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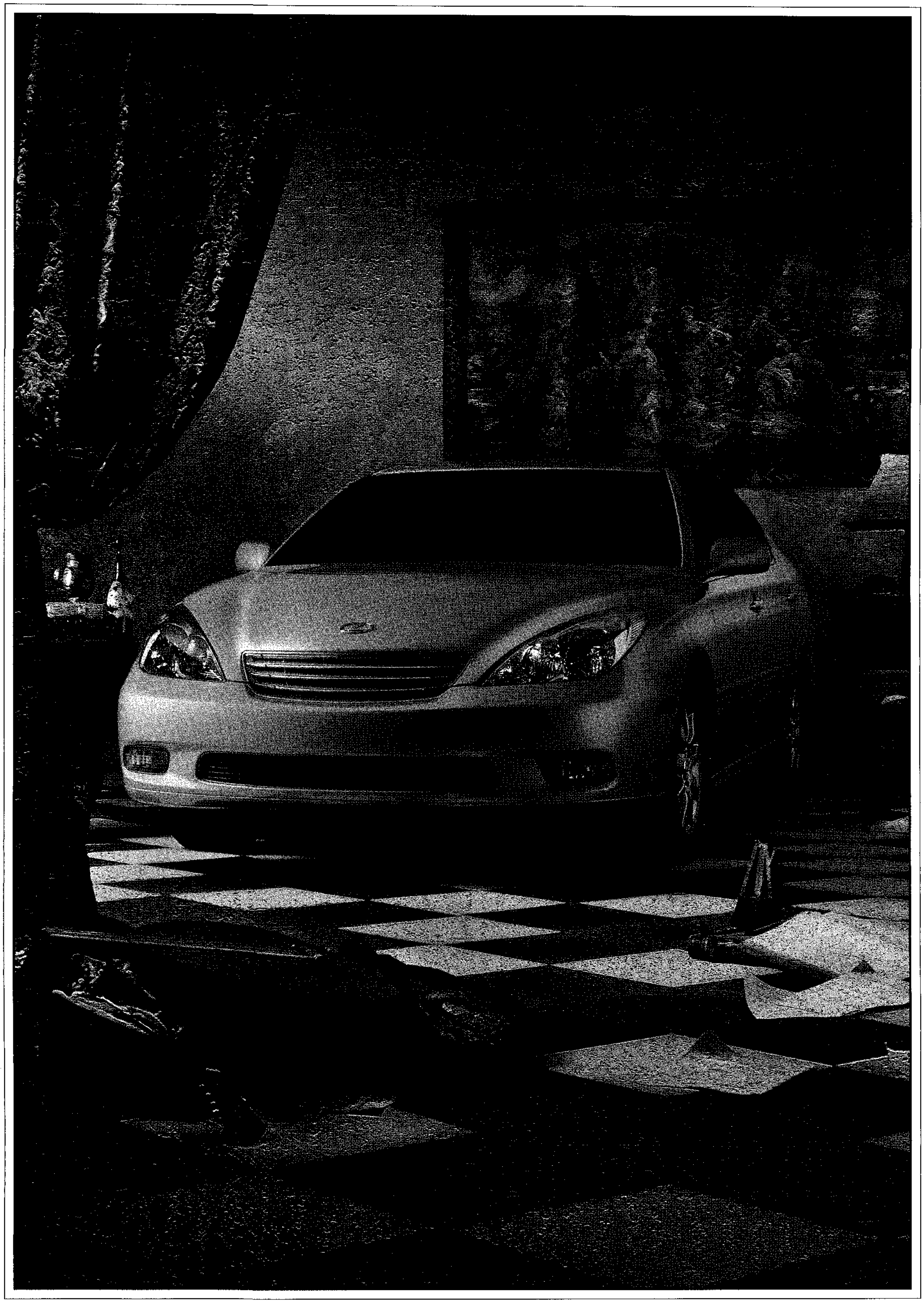

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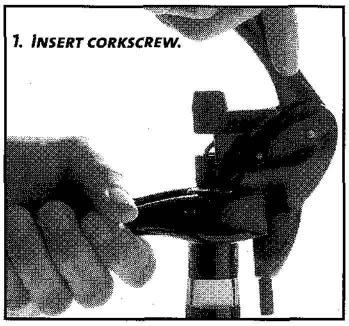

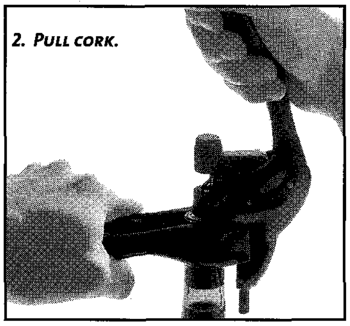

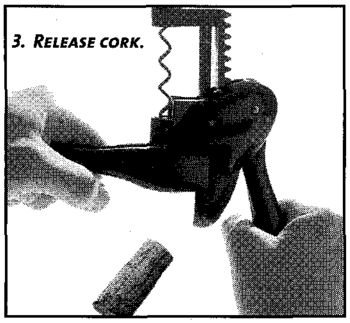

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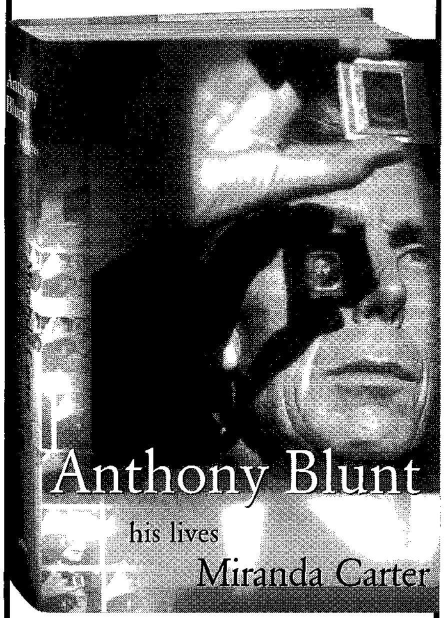

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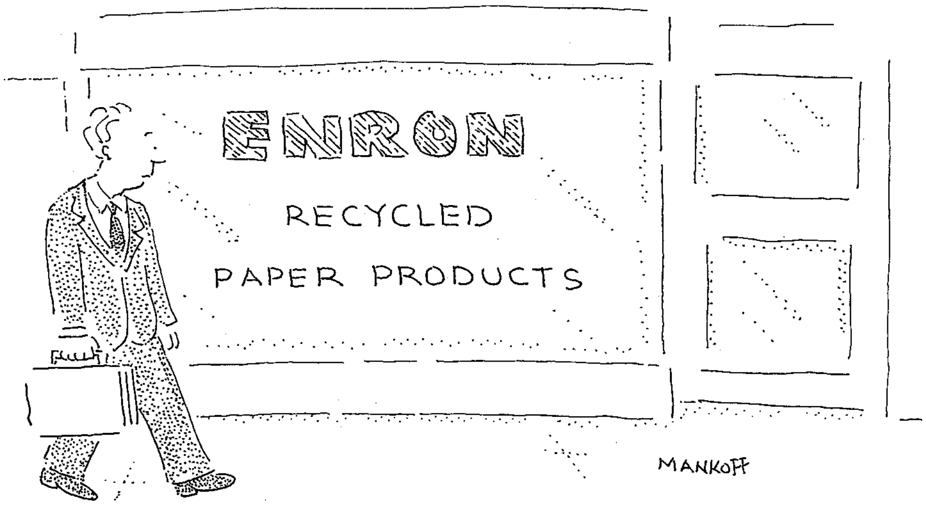

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THE MAIL

THE AIDS LIFEBOAT

Michael Specter is right to argue that vigorous prevention programs are essential to India's efforts to combat its AIDS epidemic ("India's Plague," December 17th). He is wrong, however, to pit prevention against treatment. Ignoring the millions of people already infected with H.I.V.-AIDS is ethically troublesome and clinically irrational. Treatment benefits not only individuals but communities, resulting in fewer hospitalizations and deaths, fewer infected infants, and fewer orphans. Those who receive adequate treatment can support their families, and are likely to be less infectious. The ability to provide treatment also reinvigorates demoralized health-care workers. The complexities involved in treating patients in poor communities are great, but pilot programs have avoided the problems of toxicity and nonadherence that Specter rightly fears may lead to more resistant strains of H.I.V. In our experience, it is treatment that helps overcome stigma. It is treatment that helps bring people to care. It is treatment that can make people look beyond today and practice prevention methods to protect themselves and their communities.

Wafaa El-Sadr
Professor of Epidemiology
Mailman School of Public Health
Miriam Rabkin
Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine
College of Physicians and Surgeons
Columbia University
New York City

Specter's critique of the push for cheap AIDS drugs in the developing world could hardly be more timely. Subsidizing costly and complex medications is admirable as an expression of solidarity, but it is not appropriate to the situation facing many poor nations, and is potentially harmful if it diverts medical resources and political attention from more cost-effective approaches. Many interventions, from prevention to early childhood education, would save more lives per dollar spent than would sophisticated AIDS treatment, and, in a situation of fundamental scarcity, deserve priority.

Harold Pollack
Assistant Professor of Health Management and Policy
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Mich.

Specter presents the battle against AIDS as a classic lifeboat situation—some people must drown for the rest to live. The question is: Who's in the boat, and how many people can it really hold? A coherent global AIDS strategy, with antiretroviral therapy for everyone who needs it, would require only a modest sacrifice by the wealthiest countries. Specter implies that each nation is an island, and that the current structure of health-care financing is immutable. But the universe of limited possibilities is not "reality." We have chosen where to draw the boundaries.

Aaron Shakow
Publications Director, Partners In Health
Boston, Mass.

LORDS OF CANADA

Calvin Trillin, in his article on Conrad Black, mocks the title-heavy names of several Governors General of Canada ("Paper Baron," December 17th). He writes that Canada's diversity and egalitarianism have taught its citizens to disdain "the sort of life that might tempt a man to take a title like Lord Tweedsmuir and then use it with a straight face." One should hope not. Lord Tweedsmuir is better known as John Buchan, the author of sixty books, the most celebrated of which, "The Thirty-nine Steps," was made into a film by Alfred Hitchcock. The first commoner named to the post, in 1935, he adopted the Scottish title at the insistence of King George V.

Sydney L. Mayer
London, England

•

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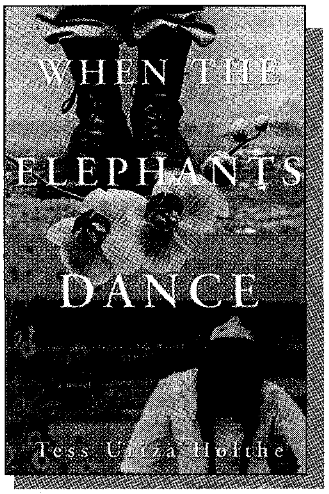

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BEA ARTHUR ON BROADWAY: JUST BETWEEN FRIENDS
The stage and screen star performs songs and reminisces about her six-decade career, accompanied by the pianist Billy Goldenberg. In previews. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

DEAD TECH
Kristin Marting and Celise Kalke's adaptation of Ibsen's "The Master Builder" incorporates seminal architectural and technological literature. With music by Todd Griffin. In previews Jan. 30-Feb. 2. Opens Feb. 3 at 8. (Puritan Iron Foundry, 56 Water St. Brooklyn. 212-647-0202.)

FINDER'S FEE
A play by Wesley Moore, about a real-estate deal gone bad. In previews through Feb. 2. Opens Feb. 3 at 7. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl., at 11th St. 627-2556.)

FOUR
The Worth Street Theatre Company and Manhattan Theatre Club's production of a drama by Christopher Shinn, which examines the interconnected relationships between four people on a single day—the Fourth of July, 1996—in Hartford, Connecticut. Jeff Cohen is the director. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

FURTHER THAN THE FURTHEST THING
After a volcano erupts, an isolated island community is evacuated to an industrial town, in a drama by the Scottish playwright Zinnie Harris. The cast includes Jennifer Dundas, Dan Futterman, Peter Gerety, Robert Hogan, and Jenny Sterlin. Neil Pepe is the director. In previews through Feb. 3. Opens Feb. 5 at 6:45. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

LAPIS BLUE BLOOD RED
Cathy Caplan's drama about the life of the Italian baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi, based in part on her letters and the court transcripts from the trial of a man accused of raping her and stealing one of her paintings. Previews begin Feb. 1. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202.)

OCCUPANT
Anne Bancroft returns to the stage to portray the painter Louise Nevelson, in a new drama by Edward Albee. Anthony Page is the director. Previews begin Feb. 5. (Signature, 555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529.)

ONE MAN
The British actor Steven Berkoff is in town for a seven-week engagement of his latest show, a trio of monologues: "The Tell-Tale Heart," adapted from Poe, and "Actor" and "Dog," which Mr. Berkoff wrote. Preview on Jan. 30. Opens Jan. 31 at 8. (45 Bleecker Theatre, at 45 Bleecker St. 253-9983.)

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PETER AND WENDY
A Bunraku-puppet adaptation of J. M. Barrie's classic children's tale, from the experimental troupe Mabou Mines. Previews begin Feb. 1. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

RUNT OF THE LITTER
The former Houston Oiler Bo Eason performs his semiautobiographical one-man show, about a small-town boy who makes it to the N.F.L. Preview on Jan. 30. Opens Jan. 31 at 8. (MCC Theatre, 120 W. 28th St. 206-1515.)

SORROWS & REJOICINGS
Judith Light, Charlayne Woodard, John Glover, and Marcy Harriell star in a new play by Athol Fugard, set in post-apartheid South Africa. In previews through Feb. 3. Opens Feb. 4 at 6:30. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422.)

TO YOU, THE BIRDIE! (PHÈDRE)
Frances McDormand, Kate Valk, and Willem Dafoe lead the cast in the Wooster Group's latest work, based on Racine's "Phèdre." Previews begin Feb. 1. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St. Brooklyn. 966-3651.)

OPENED RECENTLY

THE BRIDGE IN SCARSDALE
Jacques Lévy ("Oh! Calcutta!") is the director of a new play by Robert Remington Wood, about a bridge designer, his estranged painter wife, who has been institutionalized for twenty-five years, and their son, who reunites them. (Phil Bosakowski Theatre, 354 W. 45th St. 279-4200.)

BRUTAL IMAGINATION
Cornelius Eady's adaptation of his book of poetry about the notorious Susan Smith case, in which the South Carolinian (played to trailer-trash perfection by Sally Murphy) fabricated a generic black man (the excellent Joe Morton) as the carjacking abductor of her two children—whom in fact she'd murdered by locking them in her Mazda and then rolling it into a river. Rather than a play, the show is a lyrical, somewhat didactic recitation of the story and of the numbing ways that racism allowed the town of Union to band together for more than a week in search of the figment of Smith's imagination. It has many affecting moments, especially when Morton, as the nonexistent Mr. Zero, brings to life a cast of uncomfortably familiar caricatures (Stepin Fetchit, Uncle Tom, Buckwheat, Aunt Jemima, et al.). Still, it would have been more compelling to let Smith and Mr. Zero interact with each other—really hammer out their imagined relationship. That might have been truly brutal. With music by Diedre Murray. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 353-0303. Closes Feb. 3.)

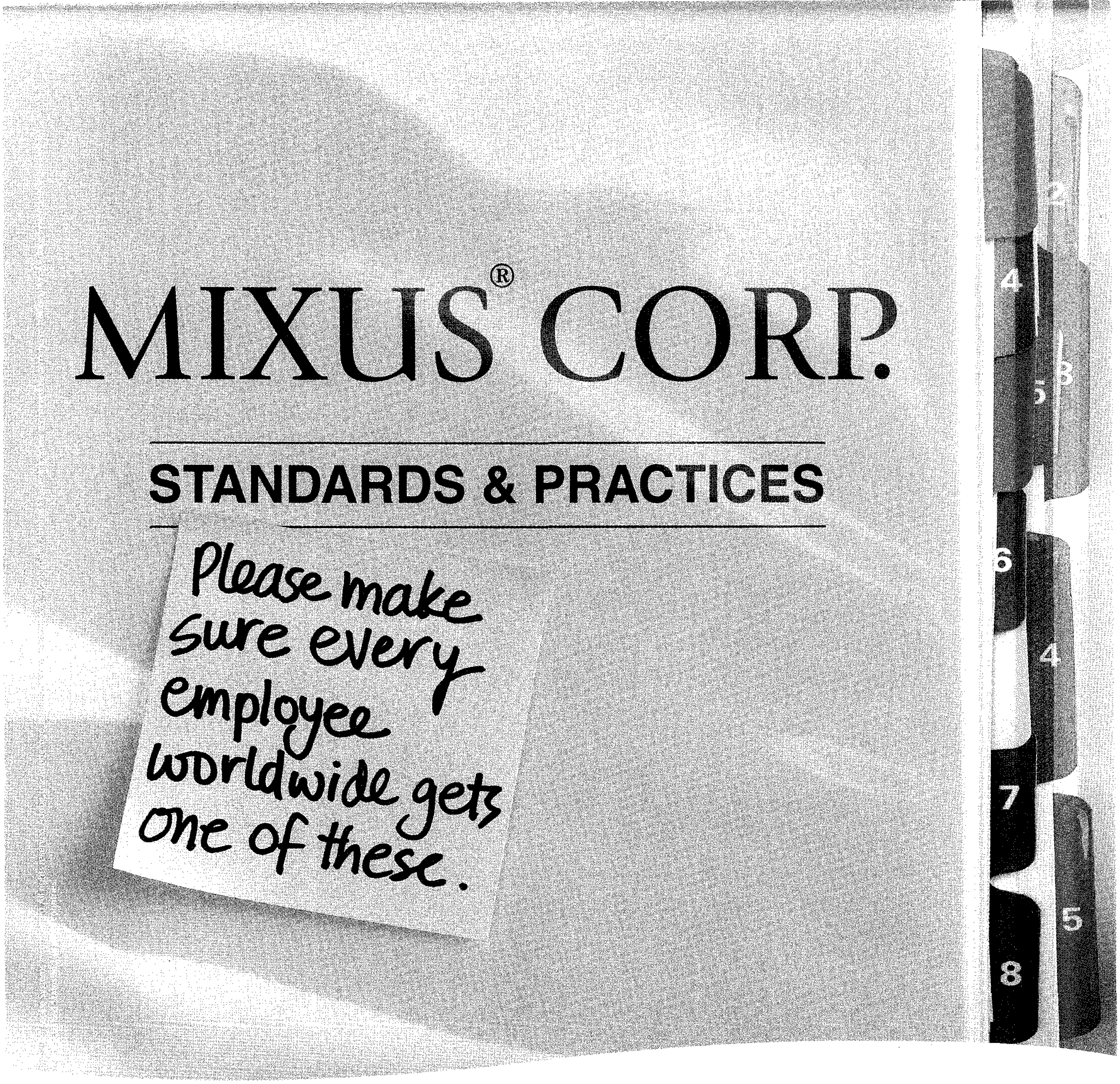
CARSON MC CULLERS (HISTORICALLY INACCURATE)
The Georgia-born writer's life and work is the subject of a new play by Sarah Schulman, directed by Marion McClinton. (Women's Project Theatre, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200.)

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (ABRIDGED)
Three actors perform thirty-seven plays and a hundred and fifty-four sonnets in under two hours. (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

CYMBELINE
Theatre for a New Audience's staging of Shakespeare's play, directed by Bartlett Sher. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

HOBSON'S CHOICE
Maggie Hobson, daughter of a Lancashire boot merchant, is a force to be reckoned with in Harold Brighouse's 1915 comedy, and Martha Plimpton inhabits her to her fingernails. Maggie perceives that the time is ripe for a personal economic, social, and sexual revolution, and perhaps Plimpton has recognized a similar opportunity for her craft and her career; she is the powerful engine driving this bright Atlantic Theatre Company production, directed by David Warren. Virtually everybody in the play is her foil, most prominently Brian Murray as her father, a big blowhard about to get blown over. Murray employs vaudeville and music-hall techniques worthy of Edgar Kennedy and W. C. Fields, getting laughs just by donning a top hat and a scowl. David Aaron Baker does a neat turn as the simple cobbler Maggie means to transform into an independent businessman and suitable husband—kind of a reverse "Pygmalion." Brighouse may not have Shaw's intellectual bite, but after the ponderous "Major Barbara" performed in the city a few months ago his play is all the more welcome for that. (336 W. 20th St. 239-6200. Closes Feb. 10.)

HOMEBODY/KABUL
Tony Kushner's play, set in London and Afghanistan in 1998, concerns the necessity and the dangers of engagement with the world, and it is no surprise, really, that this most political of playwrights should have happened to be thinking for the last several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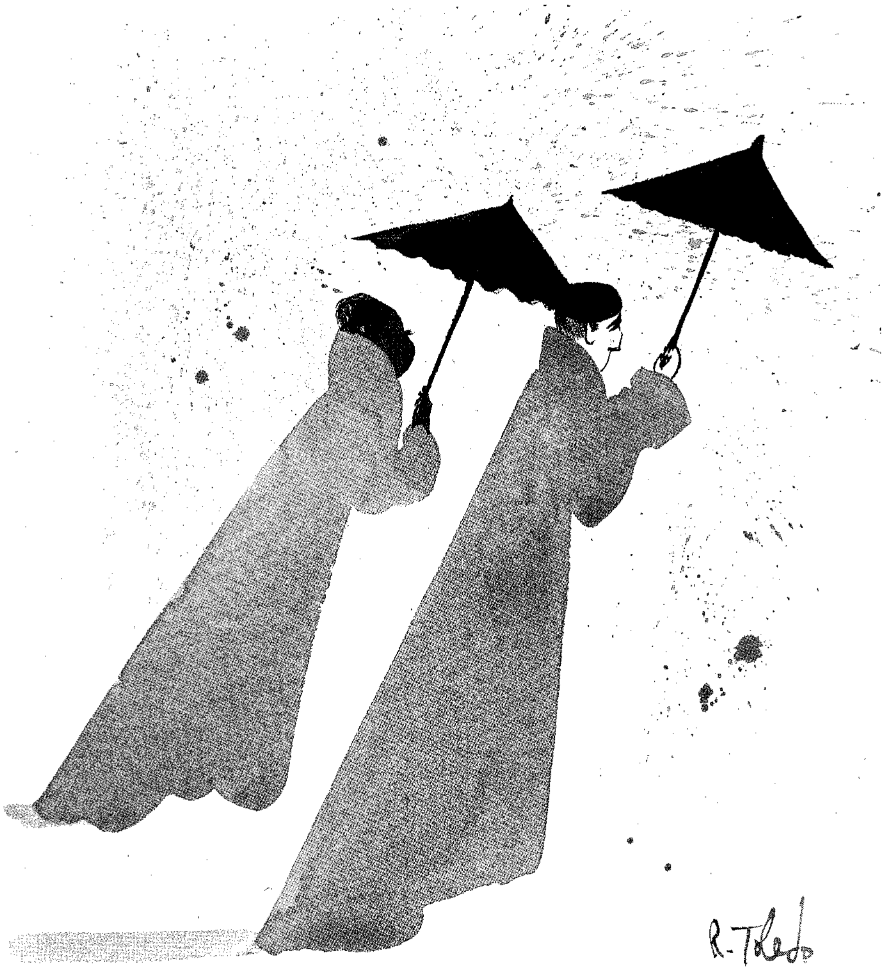
years about matters that until recently did not engage most people in this country. The first act consists of an hour-long monologue by a middle-aged Englishwoman, memorably brought to life by Linda Emond, who is a lover of old books and lost causes—these she finds "irrelevant and irresistible," and part of what makes her words so riveting is that it's never entirely clear whether her attachment to the dustbin of history has more to do with history or with the dustbin. The character is a fascinating study in both isolation and passion. Her desire to act, to be part of history—to not remain "suspended in the Rhetorical Colloidal Forever that agglutinates between Might and Do"—leads her to Kabul, where she disappears. In a way, that's when the play disappears, too; it is at its most powerful before it ever leaves home. The subsequent three hours devolve into an unsatisfying tangle of themes and characters, but such is the strength of the first act—and of Emond's performance—that the sense that something important is at stake carries through. The cast of eleven is under the direction of Declan Donnellan. (Reviewed in our issue of 1/28/02.) (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 239-6200.)



Theatre for a New Audience's staging of Shakespeare's "Cymbeline."

RUBEN TOLEDO

MAMMA MIA!

This smorgasbord of song, the brainchild of Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus, the male half of the seventies supergroup ABBA, is nothing but hokum—a chucklehead pleasure. Andersson and Ulvaeus have shrewdly allowed their platinum hits to be sent up by a story that pits the impudence of youth against the resilience of middle age. Catherine Johnson's book, which is simply a slick cartoon that connects the dots between ABBA's No. 1 singles, asks the question: Can twenty-year-old Sophie, the daughter of a hippie dropout who was the leader of a girl group called Donna and the Dynamos, find out which of the three men she's invited to her wedding is her real father? Though the show is cunningly directed by Phyllida Lloyd and given the proper vulgar acrylic touch by the designer Mark Thompson, the question—a multimillion-dollar McGuffin—remains unanswered. (11/5/01) (Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 563-5544.)

MARIA DEL BOSCO
(SEX & RACING CARS: A SOUND OPERA)

The avant-garde playwright Richard Foreman's fiftieth play. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

MONSTER

Michael Greif ("Rent") is the director of a new play by Neal Bell, based on Mary Shelley's novel "Frankenstein." (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 677-4210. Closes Feb. 17.)

MOSTLY SONDHEIM

In her one-woman show, Barbara Cook performs songs by Stephen Sondheim, as well as songs by his favorite composers. Sundays and Mondays at 7:30, through Feb. 11. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

NOISES OFF

Jeremy Sams's revival of Michael Frayn's 1982 backstage comedy, a farce within an antic farce, is blissful fun. As the dysfunctional troupe of the travelling show "Nothing On," all the members of the excellent cast—Patti LuPone, Peter Gallagher, Richard Easton, Faith Prince, Edward Hibbert, Katie Finneran, T. R. Knight, Thomas McCarthy, and Robin Weigert—shine in roles that lesser comedians would surely find daunting. Frayn's construction requires spot-on comic timing, and with the help of Sams, this production delivers it—and then some. The laughs rumble through the audience from start to finish. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

PERMANENT VISITOR

A two-month festival of plays about or by Dawn Powell, or based on her works. (78th Street Theatre, 236 W. 78th St. 206-1515.)

PUPPETRY OF THE PENIS

It's one thing for a man to develop the ability to stretch his scrotum until it's the size of a dinner plate, but another to share this talent with the world. These two Australians, Simon Morley and David (Friendy) Friend, profess embarrassment at the success of their "little pub show," but it's still a con: fifteen minutes into their act they are utterly naked and out of ideas. They can't go on, but they do. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

THE RING: THE OPERATIC
ERA LABORATORY

Target Margin Theatre presents five new plays examining Wagner's epic opera: "Ring Cycle," by the Rattazzi Brothers; "Siegfried's Nerve," adapted by Lucas Hnath; "Über," by Ethan Hein; "Boca," adapted by Yuri Skujins; and "Valkyrie; or, What Happens When a Good-Natured Goddess Goes Bad," by Aaron Tugendhaft, Susanna Gellert, and Chloe Johnston. (Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Center, 107 Suffolk Street. 358-3657.)

SEXAHOLIX . . . A LOVE STORY

"A little coitus / Never hoit us," John Leguizamo jokes in his third one-man Broadway show, a crowd-pleasing hip-hop account of sexual escapades. Starting with the wacky impoverishment of his Colombian-Puerto Rican upbringing and ending with proud parenthood as the father of two "Jewricans," Leguizamo is noisy, funny, inventive, and sweet. He brings new sounds, new moves, and a new audience to the Great White Way. (He even dances in the aisles.) Next time, though, he'd do well to bring new material, too. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

SPEED-HEDDA

The Los Angeles troupe Fabulous Monsters Performance Company brings its all-male adaptation of "Hedda Gabler" to town for a brief engagement. Thursdays through Sundays, through Feb. 3. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

TAPE

Having seen the recent movie adaptation starring the marquee actors Ethan Hawke, Uma Thurman, and Robert Sean Leonard is no excuse for skipping Stephen Belber's terrific (and here expanded) play about three high-school friends (Dominic Fumusa, Josh Stamberg, and Alison West), who years after graduation find themselves unexpectedly hashing out the aftereffects of a traumatic sexual incident that has haunted each of them in different ways. The director Geoffrey Nauffts has done a great job of staging the play's new version in the tiny José Quintero Theatre; the action spans two decades but is confined to a shabby hotel room in East Lansing, Michigan. Belber has expert fun torturing his characters with the things that never get said, yet the language is uniquely telling and the underlying grief shines through. And this Off Broadway production has one thing in particular that the movie could never claim to have: the funny-sad, love-hate chemistry that endures between two true friends, Fumusa and Stamberg, for whom the play was written; it's something to see. (534 W. 42nd St. 244-7529. Closes Feb. 2.)

TARTUFFE

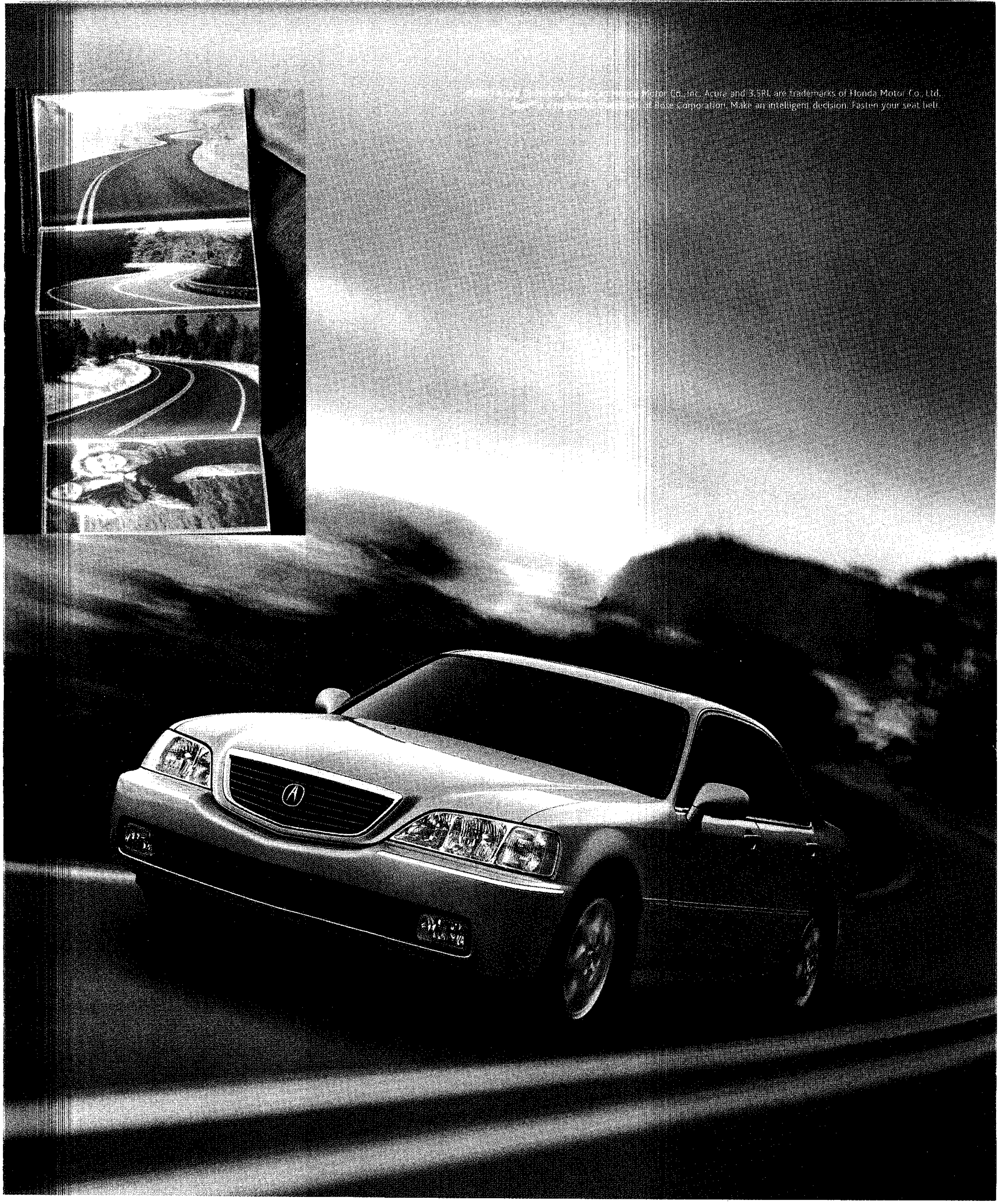
The Worth Street Theatre Company presents a new version of Molière's comedy, written and directed by Jeff Cohen. The cast includes Gerald Anthony, Crista Moore, and the playwright Keith Reddin. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St. 206-1515. Closes Feb. 16.)

UNDERNEATH THE LINTEL

This one-man show, written by Glen Berger and performed by David Chandler, manages to be both a funny tale of a Dutch librarian's midlife crisis and a serious, intriguing look at the value of any one life. After a book is returned to the library a hundred and thirteen years overdue, the librarian becomes obsessed with finding out how and why. He eventually comes to believe that the Wandering Jew was the errant borrower, whose late return of the volume is one of a series of clues he's left in a desperate attempt to document his existence. As billed, it's "An Impressive Presentation of Lovely Evidences." Directed by Randy White. (Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

URINETOWN

The amount of fun to be had at this musical, by Greg Kotis (book and lyrics) and Mark Hollmann (music and lyrics), is in direct proportion to the un-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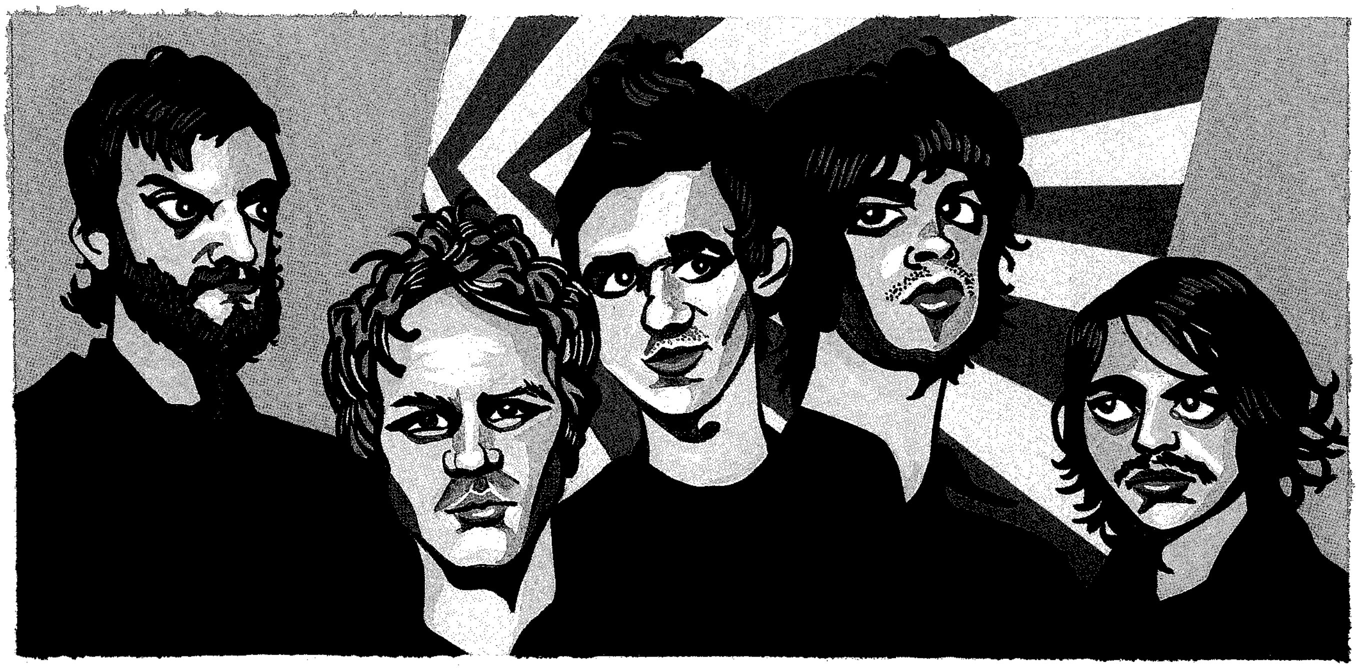
pleasantness of its title. Its central idea is that an evil corporation controls all the toilets in a city that bears some resemblance to New York, but the show is really no more and no less than a terrifically spirited sendup of musicals and their conventions, as self-conscious and gag-happy as a Warner Bros. cartoon (not only does a sign saying "Secret Hideout" hang above a secret hideout; the sign has an arrow on it). (10/1/01) (Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)



Fresh from Omaha, Nebraska, the rock-and-roll band the Faint plays the Bowery Ballroom and Northsix.

LEAH TINARI

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.
BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4747.
BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.
CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.
CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.
CONTACT
Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.
DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200.
FORBIDDEN BROADWAY: 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.
42ND STREET
Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.
THE FULL MONTY
Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.
I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.
THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.
LOVE, JANIS
Village Theatre, 158 Bleecker St. 307-4100.
LES MISÉRABLES
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.
PERFECT CRIME
Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.
THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.
THE PRODUCERS
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.
PROOF
Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.
RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.
STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 477-2477.
THE SYRINGA TREE
Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.
THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE
Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.
TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING
St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.
THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
Jan. 30 at 8: "Hallelujah Junction," the divertimento from "Le Baiser de la Fée," and "Firebird." ♦ Jan. 31 at 8: "Swan Lake," "Allegro Brillante," "Romeo and Juliet," and "Firebird." ♦ Feb. 1 at 8: "Tchaikovsky Suite No. 3," "Opus 19/The Dreamer," and "Variations Sérieuses." ♦ Feb. 2 at 2: "Raymonda Variations," the divertimento from "Le Baiser de la Fée," and "Stravinsky Violin Concerto." ♦ Feb. 2 at 8: "Opus 19/The Dreamer," "Afternoon of a Faun," "A Suite of Dances," and "I'm Old Fashioned." ♦ Feb. 3 at 3: "Raymonda Variations," "Stravinsky Violin Concerto," and "I'm Old Fashioned." ♦ Feb. 5 at 7:30: "Divertimento No. 15," "Ash," and "Variations Sérieuses." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 870-5570. Through Feb. 24.)

"BE WITH"
The wife-and-husband team Eiko and Koma join forces with the eighty-one-year-old modern-dance choreographer Anna Halprin. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Jan. 29-Feb. 1 at 8, Feb. 2 at 2 and 8, and Feb. 3 at 7:30.)

BILL T. JONES / ARNIE ZANE DANCE COMPANY
"I grew up in a rhythm-and-blues culture and dropped acid at Woodstock with Jimi Hendrix," says Bill T. Jones. These days, though, he just drops names. And if he's a groupie of anything it's the early Romantics. He has set a lyrical, squiggly dance to Beethoven's delicate String Quartet in F Major, Op. 135, and a rambunctious athletic work (a dancer hurtles into a bunch of other dancers, knocking them over like pins) to a Shostakovich piece from the composer's sullen, Romantic youth. The program also includes a fable set to a fragmentary score by the Hungarian modernist György Kurtág and, on alternate programs, a reprise of "D-Man in the Waters," to Mendelssohn. The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center provides the live accompaniment. (Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center. 875-5788. Jan. 31-Feb. 2 at 8 and Feb. 3 at 5.)

"BEST WESTERN"
"If you were really tired and ate some bad escargots and then passed out while reading the George Jones autobiography and listening to a classic-country station, 'Best Western' might be the kind of hallucinations you'd have," says the onetime drag artist Stacy Dawson about her postmodern homage to country singers such as Conway Twitty, Patsy Cline, and George Jones. Dawson and the show's other big-haired performers move seamlessly between an imaginary tour bus; a "porch world," populated by "the type of people who were written into classic country songs—the celebrities before their celebrity"; and the stage, where the entertainers do karaoke versions of country stars and dance in the style of "a guy who's been working on a farm his entire life suddenly doing extreme moves." (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Jan. 31 at 8:30, Feb. 1-2 at 8:30 and 11, and Feb. 3 at 8:30.)

"BEHOLD BOLD SAM DOG"
To explain the title of her new work, the veteran downtown choreographer Susan Rethorst explains that she sometimes dreams in the rhythms of the book she's reading. "One night, it will be nineteenth-century rhythms and the next, pulp fiction or Hemingway. The phrases I remember in the morning seem to refer to something specific, but don't actually." Her choreography has a similarly uncanny but untraceable effect. When, in one instance, Vicky Schick extends her hand from her forehead, she could be saluting her captain, looking out yonder, wiping sweat from her brow, or performing an abstract modern-dance move. The melancholy and mesmerizing work features the impulsive, clodhopping Jodi Melnick but revolves around the calm and thoughtful Schick. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Jan. 31-Feb. 3 at 8:30.)

NIGHT LIFE CONCERTS

DICK HYMAN AND JOHN SHERIDAN
The so-called "novelty" piano pieces that Hyman and Sheridan have resurrected on their new CD, "Forgotten Dreams," aren't the kind of ditties that your grandmother once played on the old upright in the family parlor. These are the knuckle-busting exercises and harmonically advanced works that

TABLES FOR TWO

PUNCH

913 Broadway (673-6333)—If Tom Wolfe were inclined to do to trendy cuisine what he did to trendy art criticism, he might start with the menu at this jazzed-up hole-in-the-wall near ABC Carpet & Home, which announces its presence with a whimsical wrought-iron sign that promises unusual doings beyond an easy-to-miss entrance.

From the New American terra firma of Maine-lobster-and-corn chowder, Punch's bill of fare takes off on a global spin that provides what must be the best menu reading in town. Appetizers jump from "petite" empanadas made with merguez and manchego to calamari cracklings with wasabi aioli, mizuna, and something called "ponzu dip." "Light plates" include ahi wonton tacos with green-papaya slaw and something called "bumbu dunk." Among the pastas is a Malay red vegetable curry with soba noodles and tofu crisps. Entrées include a braise of veal and endive in preserved-lemon sauce, and more crisps (of lemon sole), accompanied by toasted mango and coconut rice topped with curry sauce.

Punch offers a variety of casual fare, the most impressive of which is a knuckle sandwich, constructed on pumpernickel with pork, smoked trotter bits, Muenster cheese, and caramelized sauerkraut. Fortunately, the setting—walls painted in a harlequinish pattern, torch lamps with Venetian shades—is cheerfully relaxed, and the chef's wanderlust is matched by a light and zestful hand. Particularly successful are an Arctic-crab spring roll with hoi-an herbs; mussels steeped with linguiça and tomatoes and sharpened with smoked paprika; a pasta casserole with potatoes, tomatoes, toasted haricots, sheep's-milk cheese, and Tuscan greens; and a chicken breast with sorrel and a mash of fingerling potatoes which is so good and simple that one feels like Dorothy waking up in Kansas after her trip to Oz. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $11-$23.)

—*Charles Michener*

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proliferated in the nineteen-twenties and thirties and were composed by the likes of Willie (the Lion) Smith, Zez Confrey, and Bix Beiderbecke. Hyman and Sheridan's fellow-pianists Ruth Laredo and Jon Weber will join them in what looks to be a nostalgia-free evening. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 415-5500. Jan. 30 at 8.)

"JAZZ AT THE PENTHOUSE"

Mark O'Connor was the country fiddler of choice in the eighties (he appeared on more than four hundred and fifty albums), but he gave up his Nashville studio career some ten years ago for other interests, including the Gallic jazz of the guitarist Django Reinhardt and the violinist Stephane Grappelli. (O'Connor and Grappelli were good friends and performed and recorded together a number of times before Grappelli's death, in 1997.) On his own, the violinist can get as sweet toned and lyrical as need be, and when it comes time to swing he knows what he's doing. The bassist and Grappelli veteran Jon Burr and the guitarist Frank Vignola, O'Connor's cohorts on his 2001 Grappelli tribute, "Hot Swing!," will also be on hand. (Kaplan Penthouse, Rose Building, Lincoln Center. 721-6500. Jan. 31-Feb. 2 at 8.)

CREED

To judge from its insufferably earnest hard rock, this wildly successful foursome aspires to the bighearted heights of vintage U2, but preachy lyrics and irony-free bombast keep Creed down among the masses—never mind the leather-trousered lead vocalist Scott Stapp's frequent invocation of the crucifixion pose and shameless appropriation of Eddie Vedder's throaty baritone. (Continental Airlines Arena, the Meadowlands. 212-307-7171. Feb. 1 at 7:30.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE

Presenting Scandinavian fiddle music with Hauk Buen and Bruce Sagan. (Washington Square Church, 135 W. 4th St. 545-7536. Feb. 1 at 8.)

"JAZZ COMPOSER PORTRAITS"

Obscurity, thy name is James Black. A local legend in New Orleans, the drummer and composer Black showed up on a handful of albums by Yusef Lateef and Cannonball Adderley in the nineteen-sixties and on a smattering of recordings thereafter until his death, in 1988; his unrecognized work will be praised by the pianist Eric Reed and bandmates including the drummer Jason Marsalis, whose father, Ellis, also worked with Black. A revelatory program is assured. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Feb. 1 at 8.)

ALICIA KEYS

This twenty-one-year-old New York City native shot to stardom last year with her début record, "Songs in A Minor," and now the piano-playing soul singer stands to conquer the upcoming Grammy Awards. She recently garnered six nominations, which just happens to be one less than the earnest R. & B. newcomer India Arie received. Expect a powerhouse performance as Keys looks to prove that she's worthy of the talk about her as the heavy favorite in the Best New Artist category. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. Feb. 1-2 at 8.)

SPEAKEASY STRING QUARTET

Playing the works of Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke, Fats Waller, and George Gershwin, arranged for string quartet. (Storm Theatre, 145 W. 46th St. Feb. 1-2 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

WYCLIFFE GORDON QUINTET

The trombonist and tuba virtuoso is no shrinking violet. Gordon's blustery, warmhearted efforts with Wynton Marsalis's septet and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra merely foreshadowed his own work as a leader, which is demonstrative, laden with Southern charm, and alive with promise. (Washington Irving High School, 16th St. at Irving Pl. Feb. 2 at 8. For more information, call 586-4680.)

"LYRICS & LYRICISTS"

In honor of Black History Month, this 92nd Street Y series features a program of songs by African-American composers. LaTanya Hall, Carol Woods, Lawrence Hamilton, and other Broadway veterans take on compositions by Fats Waller, Maceo Pinkard, and Spenser Williams. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 415-5500. Feb. 2 at 8, Feb. 3 at 2:30 and 8, and Feb. 4 at 2 and 8.)

GENO DELAFOSE

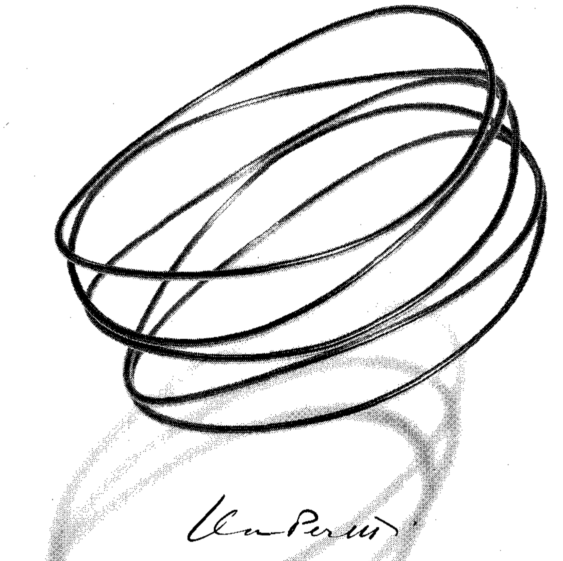
The son of the legendary accordionist John Delafose started out in his dad's ensemble, the Eunice Playboys, when he was still in elementary school. Over the following two decades (he's just thirty), he picked up both the piano-key and the button accordions. He appears here with his French Rockin' Boogie band for a night of dancing, southwestern-Louisiana style. (Hungarian House, 213 E. 82nd St. Feb. 3 at 7:30. For more information, call 685-7597.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL

237 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—Jan. 29-30: **Bruce Willis and the Accelerators.** Yes, that Bruce Willis. Adopting a brusque, blue-collar alter ego, Bruno, to crank out bluesy rock, Willis has been on tour recently, and he's reportedly had trouble with ticket sales in the Midwest. Apparently people didn't believe the movie star was coming to their town. They must have forgotten the two albums he released in the eighties. In his return to the stage he goes one better than Keanu Reeves, Russell Crowe, and other actors turned musicians: Willis has started a record label, and his flagship artist, **Ivan Neville,** the son of Aaron, is the open-



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ing act. Feb. 1: **Ashford and Simpson,** the Rodgers and Hart of Motown. Back in the late sixties, this husband-and-wife duo penned and produced such classics as "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" and "Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing." Feb. 2: **James Brown.** It will be standing room only at this rare small-club appearance by the Godfather of Soul.

BLARNEY STAR
43 Murray St. (732-2873)—Feb. 1: The Bronx-born button accordionist **Patty Furlong** and her band.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Jan. 31: The **Faint.** The pounding drum machines, flat vocals, and ever-present synthesizers of this Omaha fivesome revive the New Wave sound of the early eighties with a dark vengeance. Such songs as "Agenda Suicide," "Your Retro Career Melted," and "Ballad of a Paralyzed Citizen" might have you thinking about fashioning your skinny tie into a noose. But the Faint's custom light show and the joyful danceability of their songs will keep you swaying your hips instead.

BROWNIES
169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—Feb. 2-3: Intent on ditching the one-hit-wonder albatross hanging around their necks following "Popular," their 1996 paean to high-school social etiquette, the members of the local alternative-pop trio **Nada Surf** take a break from mixing their third album for a pair of live performances.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Feb. 2: If his membership in Chic (where he gave birth to such disco staples as "Le Freak" and "Good Times") wasn't enough to make him the patron saint of dance music, **Nile Rodgers** also went on to become one of the most prominent producers of the eighties, teaching everyone from David Bowie to Mick Jagger how to properly get down. Hot on the heels of producing an all-star rerecording of Sister Sledge's anthem "We Are Family" (he produced the 1979 original), Rodgers hits the live circuit again, albeit without Chic co-founder Bernard Edwards, who died in 1996. Feb. 4: Rock Lobster! The **B-52's** return for a twenty-fifth-anniversary show.

MAKOR
35 W. 67th St. (601-1000)—Jan. 31: The singer-songwriter **Lucy Kaplansky.** Feb. 2: **Antibalas** is a fourteen-piece multiracial Afro-beat ensemble from Williamsburg, Brooklyn, which takes its musical and political inspiration from Fela Kuti. Its shows are a thunderous mass of rhythms, horns, and bass.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Jan. 30: **Robert Bradley's Blackwater Surprise.** Bradley, a blind former street busker from Alabama by way of Detroit, has a haunting gravel-and-silk voice. Over the past half-decade he's made a name for himself with a pair of albums that mix tight Motown-inflected R. & B., driving Texas-style blues, and traditional soul. He's back on tour with songs from his forthcoming record, "New Ground." Feb. 2: The gifted vocalist **Kelly Hogan,** a veteran of the Chicago alternative-country scene, stops by with songs by the Statler Brothers, Charlie Rich, and Randy Newman, which can be found on her latest record, "Because It Feel Good." Feb. 5: **Varnaline,** the indie-rock collective led by the guitarist Anders Parker. His latest effort, the aptly titled "Songs in a Northern Key," was recorded during the winter in Vermont and upstate New York. The album is sparse and clean and as welcome as a January sunrise.

NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—Feb. 2: The **Faint** (see Bowery Ballroom).

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—Jan. 29: **Frankie Paul, Kane Juice, Maxine King,** and other reggae singers celebrate the birthday of the late reggae great Dennis Brown. Dining.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

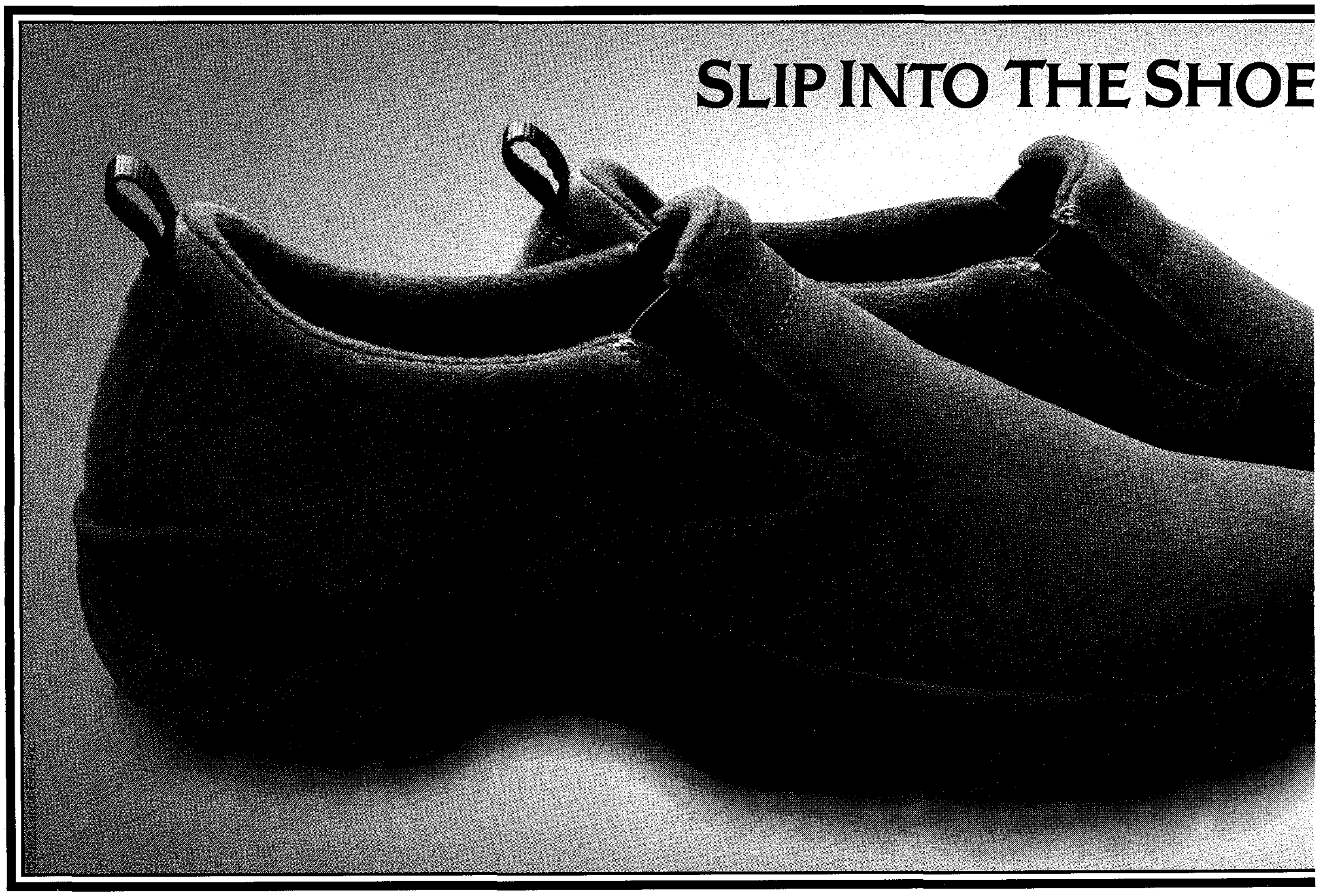
BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Jan. 31-Feb. 2: Mainstream modernist tenor saxophone doesn't get any sharper than this. Three near-revered stylists, **Joe Lovano, Michael Brecker,** and **Dave Liebman,** each touched by John Coltrane as well as myriad other tenor titans, promise to fill the room with virtuosic playing. Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Feb. 3: The Brazilian vocalist **Tania Maria.**

DANNY'S
346 W. 46th St. (265-8133)—Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays: **Blossom Dearie,** she of the porcelain voice and huge interpretive skills, has been knocking them dead for months in her own quietly effective way. This treasured veteran knows her way around standards both shopworn and contemporary, enlivening everything she touches with just the right blend of pathos, wit, and stiletto-sharp swing.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (339-4095)—Through Feb. 2: There's little that **Cleo Laine** can't enhance with her mellifluous phrasing and notable range; here she flits from American popular song to the blues to Shakespeare adaptations. Laine's husband and longtime performance partner, the saxophonist **John Dankworth,** leads her backing ensemble.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (582-2121)—Through Feb. 3: The **Gonzalo Rubalcaba** trio. Learning that the warm and sparing piano drifting hazily about Charlie Haden's most recent album, "Nocturne," is the work of Rubalcaba can come as quite a shock to those who remember the early U.S. releases of this reformed keyboard abuser.



Though the Cuban virtuoso once crammed in forty notes when four were called for, he now savors the joys of concision, and everyone wins. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—This month marks the fifteenth anniversary of the resolutely adventurous downtown club, and its longtime friends, older now but still itching to stir up trouble, turn out to celebrate. Feb. 1: The trumpeter **Joe McPhee** and his Trio X. Feb. 2: The skewed blues of **James (Blood) Ulmer,** here with his organ trio. With **Elliott Sharp's Terraplane.** Also on Feb. 2: The exceptional saxophonist, clarinettist, and flute player **Marty Ehrlich** and his quartet Travellers Tales, which takes its name from his landmark 1990 recording of the same name. Working in the company of the brilliant drummer **Bobby Previte,** as well as another saxophonist and a bassist, allows Ehrlich the room to play freewheeling, post-Ornette Coleman improvisations against his own finely crafted compositions. Feb. 3: Ehrlich brings in his chamber group, Dark Woods Ensemble. Feb. 5: The pianist **Uri Caine,** who loves linking classical music and jazz in wholly fresh, often outrageously creative ways, performs solo and with his Bedrock 3 band.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Jazz offspring are doing it for themselves, as proved by the saxophonists Joshua Redman and Ravi Coltrane and by the pianist **Kenny Drew, Jr.,** who's here with his trio through Feb. 3. With his florid dashes and prodigious technical displays, Drew doesn't much remind you of his father, Kenny, the adroit, tasteful bebop pianist. Throwing both arms around a tune, the younger Drew reveals the gothic elements of the jazz repertoire. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

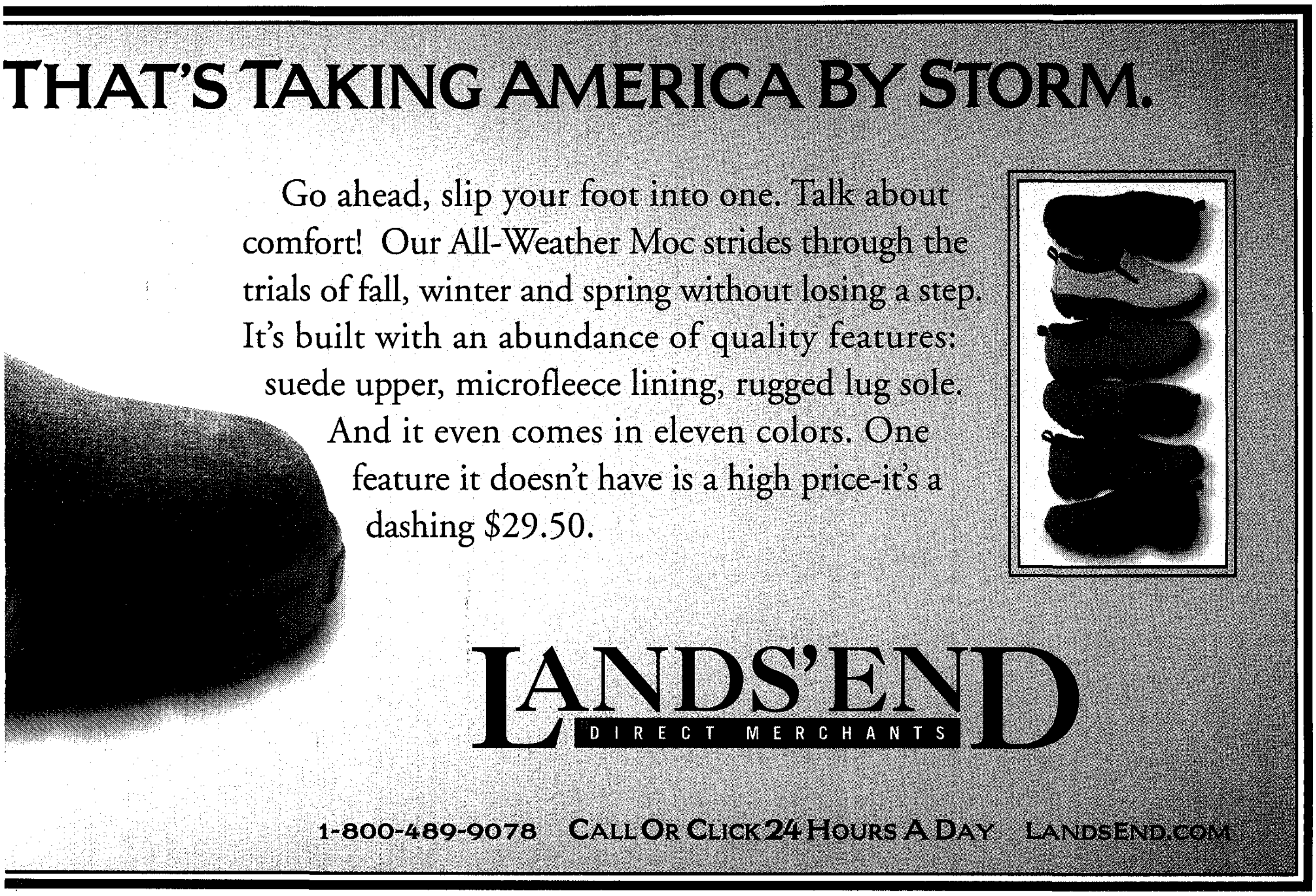
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—**"Earthly Bodies: Irving Penn's Nudes, 1949-50."** In 1949, soon after making a name for himself as a fashion photographer, Irving Penn began a sort of antifashion project. For two years, in his off-hours, he took close-up photographs of undressed, ample women. Cropped at the knees and armpits, the resulting torso-scapes are both voluptuous and spare, their bulges and creases shining like moonlit rocks. Some of the sixty prints on view could almost be mistaken for charcoal drawings: a whiplash line carves its way through an expanse of brilliant white paper and—presto!—summons up Willendorfian forms. Objectification doesn't get much better than this. Through April 21. ♦ **"Splendid Isolation: Art of Easter Island."** Through Aug. 4. ♦ **"Extreme Beauty: The Body Transformed"** traces ideals of beauty from head to toe (with notable detours at the neck, bust, and waist) and the gloriously absurd fashions that ensue in their pursuit. Curator Harold Koda contrasts recent examples of haute couture with artifacts from other cultures and historic periods, so a Comme des Garçons organza ruff about as large as an end table shares the stage with an elaborately beaded Masai collar. Through March 17. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—The artist Ricci Albenda converts the lower level of the museum into three corridors, toying with perspective and playing spatial games in the gray area between architecture and sculpture. The first, a trompe-l'oeil mural of a corridor, greets viewers as they ride down the escalator. Around the corner, viewers find an actual corridor, the mirror image of the hallway depicted in the mural. A little further on, Albenda presents a shallow relief of the same image. This through-the-looking-glass installation recalls both the solemn James Turrell (of the crater in the desert) and the playful Viktor Vasarely (of the cubic illusions). Through May 21. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—**"Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People."** Through March 3. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Paul Pfeiffer ends his yearlong stint as the museum's artist-in-residence with a pair of new digital projects. The stronger of the two is a staccato loop depicting a melee on the basketball court after the Chicago Bulls' championship victory in 1996. The fluster of black hands frantically stroking a white-clad back looks simultaneously like an orgy and a mugging. The loop runs on the diminutive screen of a video camera, installed on a pedestal inside a glass vitrine. Though no doubt intended to underscore the fetishism of technology, it dilutes the impact of the image itself. Through Feb. 24. ♦ **"Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence."** Through Feb. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6; Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from the British Museum,"** a modest blockbuster culled from the collections of the British Museum, opens with a group of rare wooden statuettes from the Old Kingdom. One of them still has a painted guideline running down the center of her torso. Equally fascinating is a drawing board, more than three thousand years old, with a mix of finished and practice motifs: a serene Pharaoh, a quail chick, and seven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crude efforts at hands. But the show also offers plenty of moments of Ozymandian grandeur, among them a reclining lion in red granite (looking a good deal more formidable than his Fifth Avenue cousins) and a vast and trunkless head of Amenhotep III. Through Feb. 24. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

DIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS
548 W. 22nd St. (989-5566)—Bruce Nauman's new video installation, "Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage)," is a magnificent ordeal, five and three-quarter hours long, which rewards the viewer for any time spent with it. Seven vast digital projections, made from tapes that were shot in darkness by infrared light, show areas of the artist's cluttered studio in rural New Mexico. Mice, a cat, and insects come and go, and night sounds are heard: wind, dogs barking, a distant train whistle. Mostly nothing happens in the shimmering, gray-green still-lifes. One has an eerie sense of eavesdropping on existence. As for John Cage, the late composer's jolly aesthetics of chance get a doleful comeuppance. Nauman's scoop on the universe is that it could not care less. Through July 27. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

GROLIER CLUB
47 E. 60th St. (838-6690)—Jorge Luis Borges once wrote, "I have always imagined that paradise will be a kind of library," and it seems fitting that this show of Borgesian ephemera is installed at the Grolier Club, a bibliophile's heaven. **"Borges: The Time Machine"** is organized in five "chapters," and it includes the expected manuscripts and correspondence (including an achingly romantic postcard to paramour Estela Canto) as well as more winsome material, like the author's childhood drawing of a tiger. Borges once declared himself "an Argentinian superstition," and the show (organized in Buenos Aires) thoroughly catalogues the anti-Borges sentiment of the Peronist regime (the dictator once demoted the author from library cataloguer to poultry inspector, a position he resigned immediately). Through Feb. 9. (Open daily, except Sundays, 10 to 5.)

GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

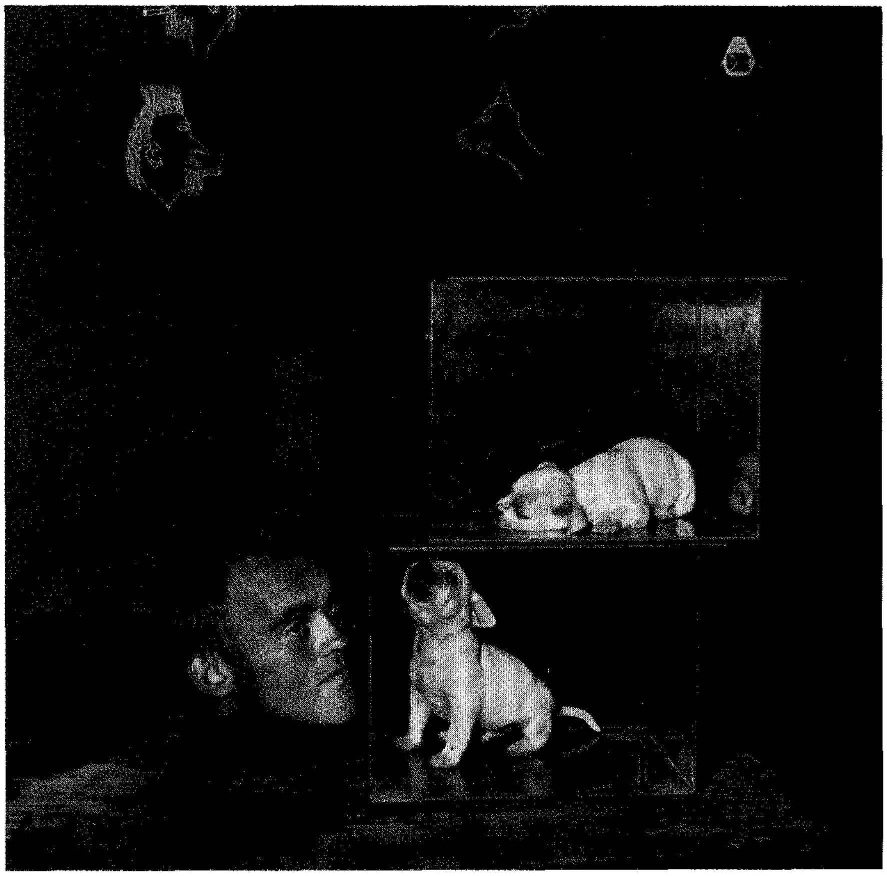
EMILY CHENG
Veils of paint swag and drape these unabashedly decorative paintings and works on paper. Cheng takes her patterns from all over: mandalas, doilies, porcelain patterns (the Wedgewood blue-and-white of "Prussian Bloom"), and ancient Chinese hair styles (the striated shapes floating in "Inner Court"). The five largest paintings take the form of targets, and the brushwork of the concentric fields evokes Kenneth Noland, even when the bull's-eye turns out to be a portrait of a cabbage. Through Feb. 23. (Winston Wachter Mayer, 39 E. 78th St. 327-2526.)

DAN GRAHAM
On the heels of the Whitney's excellent "Into the Light" exhibition, of film and video installations, the gallery revives five of Graham's rarely seen film projections from 1969 to 1973. Four of them are double projections that explore the relationship between the body and the camera. In "Roll," one wall shows a performer rolling along the ground while filming, the other shows the footage that the rolling man took of the stationary camera. In "Sunrise to Sunset," the camera arcs across a midday sky from the position of sunrise to that of sunset. The films have a refreshingly earnest, lo-fi quality for viewers used to the high production values of artists like Matthew Barney and Chris Aitken. Unfortunately, the distracting racket of the old-fashioned projectors (ten in all) sounds like the helicopter scene in "Apocalypse Now." Through Feb. 9. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160.)

KEVIN ZUCKER
This young painter takes mechanical-looking drawings of empty, banal interiors—a conference room, a theatre dressing room, a stage with a grand piano on it—manually transfers ink-jet printouts to canvas, then fills in wall and floor planes with acrylic and enamel in bland creams and beiges. The graphic schema and vellum-like surfaces steer awfully close to the style of Toba Khedoori. Zucker's contribution is a vision of semipublic spaces so uninteresting that they terrorize the soul. Through March 2. (Mary Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 752-2929.)

Short List

TREVOR WINKFIELD / TOM BURCKHARDT
De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 262-5050. Through Feb. 9.



"Untitled (Puppies on Fish Tanks)," by Roger Ballen, at Gagosian.

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

CARLOS BETANCOURT / MONICA CASTILLO
Paired solo shows from a Cuban-American and a Mexican suggest a Latino movement in body-mongering conceptual art. Betancourt's huge color photographs display nude young people, their skin graffitied with ancient symbols and unreadable script. Scrappy images from newspapers and magazines are worked into the pictures, which bear wordy, poetic titles, resulting in thematic overload. Castillo's more succinct art plays with confusions of paint and flesh. Her photographs of paint-enhanced bodies and impastoed paintings that are like newly discovered erogenous zones deftly blend decorative swank and carnal funk. A ballet dancer in a Castillo video creates instant Abstract Expressionism by prancing with jars of liquid paint attached to her waist and wrists. Through Feb 9. (Robert Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 366-4774.)

ANDREA FRASER
The artist is best known for sly institutional critiques in which she assumes the guise of a museum docent or some other officially sanctioned public speaker. But the most entertaining video in Fraser's latest show, her first in New York since 1997, turns that formula on its ear as the artist takes a spin through the Bilbao Guggenheim while listening to the museum's audio tour. As the dulcet tones of the guide condescendingly inform listeners of the building's "powerfully sensual curves" (they "have a direct appeal that has nothing to do with age, class, or education"), hidden cameras document Fraser's absurdly erotic exposure of some sensual curves of her own. Through Feb. 9. (Petzel, 535 W. 22nd St. 680-9467.)

BERNARD PIFFARETTI
French abstract painting: insouciant color and brushwork deployed with a fastidious dread of seeming to mean anything by them. Piffaretti bisects each of his canvases with a vertical stroke. He improvises a swift design on one side, then carefully repeats it on the other—recalling Robert Rauschenberg's famous burlesque of Action-painting spontaneity, "Factum I" and "Factum II." The rote, bossy irony locates Piffaretti in a tradition with such rule-fetishizing forebears as Claude Viallat, Daniel Buren, and Niele Toroni. But his jazzy stylings usually please. Call the result pedant cabaret. Through Feb. 9. (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 242-7727.)

"5 SCULPTURES"
This beautiful show of five heartfelt sculptures, all made between 1989 and 1993, has the restrained eloquence of a five-line poem about longing and loss. As the spectre of AIDS cast its shadow over the art world, artists eschewed high-gloss bravura in favor of the homespun, often salvaging materials from flea markets and the five-and-dime. The exception here is Robert Gober's cast-pewter drain, embedded in the wall like a memorial to the irretrievable. But hope and bereavement sit side by side, as Felix Gonzalez-Torres's endlessly replenished pile of red, white, and blue wrapped candies conveys the sweet and undiminishable power of love. Through Feb. 9. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 352-9460.)

Short List

CAROL RHODES / AMY SILLMAN
Sikkema, 530 W. 22nd St. 929-2262.
Through Feb. 2.
CLARA WILLIAMS
Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 243-3335.
Through Feb. 9.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

SUZAN FRECON / ANNA MARIA MAIOLINO
A roomful of Frecon's spare inky paintings makes for a sort of object lesson in thinking about preciousness. Painted on irregular sheets of paper, her hesitant compositions of fluid shapes first provoke an impatient response, and then gradually woo you back. Across the street in the center's main gallery, a sampling of a hundred drawings by the Brazilian Maiolino is a classic example of the one-woman group show. There's no doubt about Maiolino's energy and talent; in the end, though, her polymorphous œuvre serves mostly as a foil to Frecon's modest, persistent delicacy. Through Feb. 21. (Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. 219-2166.)

JEFF GABEL
Hung at eye-, knee-, and awning-level, Gabel's small, faint drawings are the visual equivalent of wallflowers. They seem to shrink out of sight but are loaded with self-effacing, slow-release charm. Gabel's characters are slackerish types who spend their time mulling over soap starlets or freehand sketches of Connecticut. Given the prominence of Gabel's run-on captions, sticklers may argue that he's more a cartoonist than a painter—closer to B. Kliban than Neil Jenney. Either way, Gabel's sotto-voce début is a season highlight. Through Feb. 2. (Spencer Brownstone, 39 Wooster St. 334-3455.)

EUGENE GABRITSCHEWSKY
A successful Russian research scientist and Sunday painter, Gabritschewsky (1893-1979) was diagnosed with schizophrenia in his early thirties and spent the latter half of his life in a mental hospital in Haar, Germany. Jean Dubuffet, the pioneer talent scout of outsider art, discovered him there in 1950 and eventually bought more than seventy of his paintings. The selection here features small watercolors of abstract forests, beasts, and vase-like biomorphs. They're pleasing, whimsical, sometimes oddly contemporary-looking pictures, without the slightest hint of either the geneticist or the schizophrenic. Through Feb. 28. (Kind, 136 Greene St. 925-1200.)

GORDON MATTA-CLARK
In 1973, an Italian curator procured a small house for the artist in Genoa and invited him over. Upon his arrival, Matta-Clark (1943-78) set to work sawing off the peak of the place's pyramid roof, removing that lid with a crane, and sawing rough horizon lines into the interior walls, allowing the rooms to be lit by his new open-air skylight. The photographs and drawings from that project are accompanied by a little Matta-Clark-style buzz-saw work in the gallery. Through Feb. 16. (Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074.)

Short List

SIEMON ALLEN / MELISSA GOULD / COCO FUSCO
Artists Space, 38 Greene St. 226-3970.
Through March 2.
MARLENE MC CARTY
American Fine Arts, 22 Wooster St., 941-0401, through Feb. 16; and Keenan, 3 Crosby St., 431-5083, through March 23.
ALAN SUICIDE
Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300.
Through Feb. 23.

PHOTOGRAPHY

DAVID ARMSTRONG
Sex and the city. This photographer's tone poems of blurred streets and portraits of pickup boyos in discouraged hotel rooms keep improving. He has mastered color that appears in chiaroscuro ranges as rich and retentive as ceramic glaze. His young men glow with tenderness and menace. Outdoors, the hour is permanent dusk, and the ambient glow and neon light evoke fever, intoxication, eyes abrim with tears. The romantic mood is potent but muted, like good music heard through a wall. Armstrong isn't just Nan Goldin's best friend anymore. Through Feb. 16. (Marks, 524 W. 24th St. 366-4774.)

ROGER BALLEN
A native New Yorker who has worked as a geologist in Johannesburg for many years, Ballen photographs poor South African whites in their cramped homes. He often spends months with his subjects, arranging painterly elements in the frame and creating theatrical tableaux that are austere and over-the-top all at once. "Sometimes I suggest something, sometimes the subject does," he says. Arbus-like figures pose against walls that are defined geometrically by electrical cords, cracks, grease spots, and old coat hangers. The pictures, many of which include vulnerable pets, are formally clear and concise and emotionally chaotic. Through Feb. 16. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 744-2313.)

EDWARD BURTYNSKY
The Canadian color photographer Edward Burtynsky is attracted to the sort of large-scale spectacles that have proved irresistible to photojournalists for so long; the acres of discarded rubber tires in California or the "Mad Max"-like wastelands in Bangladesh, where dead cargo ships are cut to pieces by day laborers. The hyper-clarity of the large prints, a testament to Burtynsky's technical ability, provides so much detail that the surfaces flirt with abstraction. It's easy to spot Pollock-like passages in the endless pattern of rubber circles and Ellsworth Kelly's harsh geometry in the metal bones of dismembered ships. Through March 2. (Cowles, 537 W. 24th St. 925-3500.)

ROBERT FRANK
Of this Swiss artist's seminal book, "The Americans," Jack Kerouac wrote: "With one hand he sucked a sad poem right out of America onto film." A selection of these photographs serves as the linchpin of this small quasi-retrospective, which also includes vintage prints from the forties and fifties (a triptych of lonesome circus portraits gives clown pictures a good name), as well as later works incorporating text and shot in Mabou, Nova Scotia. Through Feb. 25. (Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 929-7000.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 857-0000—The photographs in **"Hidden Truths: Bloody Sunday 1972"** bear witness to the events of January 30, 1972, when the British Army killed thirteen Republican protesters and bystanders in Derry, Northern Ireland. Like the J.F.K. assassination, Bloody Sunday has spawned a field of study. A purportedly final government report on the subject failed to close the debate, and the snapshots shown here were among the evidence in a recent decision to reopen the inquiry. Viewers can come to their own conclusions about the deaths of Jackie Duddy (four photographs) and Barney McGuigan (two, and an image of a banner being dipped in a pool of blood after his body was removed). Through March 17. ♦ **"Another Vietnam: Pictures of the War from the Other Side"** and **"The First Snapshots,"** an exhibition of candids shot by amateur photographers in the eighteen-hundreds with the earliest Kodak cameras, both through March 17. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

PAUL KOOIKER
James Cohan, 41 W. 57th St. 755-7171.
Through Feb. 16.
RICHARD ROTHMAN
Rodgers, 529 W. 20th St. 414-9810.
Through Feb. 16.

Ansel Adams, *Base of West Arch, Rainbow Bridge National Monument, Utah, 1942* © 2001 by the Trustees of the Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

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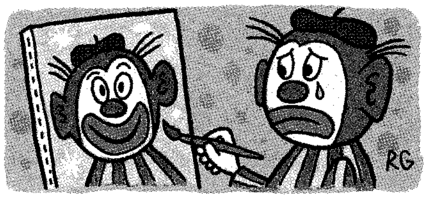
BOOK CURRENTS

Three Rings

David Carlyon begins his biography **DAN RICE: THE MOST FAMOUS MAN YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF** (PublicAffairs) with excruciating recollections of how he himself endured repeated failures as an aspiring clown before gradually learning how to read an audience. Rice, on the other hand, started penniless as a teenager in an act with an ostensibly gifted pig but quickly honed his skills as a strongman, horseback rider, and motormouth clown and became one of the most famous Americans of the mid-nineteenth century. Ever the crowd-pleaser, he was vehemently Unionist in the North and vehemently anti-abolitionist in the South. He even ran for President but pulled out of the race when the press and public began to question his platform.



In **WOMEN OF ILLUSION: A CIRCUS FAMILY'S STORY** (Palgrave), Donnalee Frega interviews Betty Huber, an elderly former acrobat, and learns about a family history of domestic violence, alcoholism, and breathtaking acrobatics. Huber learned her gymnastic skills in just six days of intensive teaching and beatings from her father. But even her story of abuse is something of a performance, as Frega comes to see over the course of the book.

Working in Paris in the nineteen-twenties, Alexander Calder became hooked on circuses. Looking to emulate the "fascinating balance in motion that the performers exhibited," he began to make his famous mobiles. **IMAGES FROM THE WORLD BETWEEN: THE CIRCUS IN 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN ART** (M.I.T.), by Donna Gustafson, illustrates how the circus has been an inspiration for both high and popular art. Cecil B. De Mille, director of "The Greatest Show on Earth," said, "I found the circus the most unifying force in American life"—a sentiment that would have pleased Dan Rice.

—*Leo Carey*

KUNIÉ SUGIURA
Tonkonow, 535 W. 22nd St. 255-8450. Through Feb. 2.

SPENCER TUNICK
I-20, 529 W. 20th St. 645-1100. Through Feb. 2.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

CHRISTIE'S
Jan. 30 at 10 A.M. and 2: An auction of fine jewels. ♦ Feb. 5 at 2 and Feb. 6 at 10 A.M. and 2: Shifting its focus after the closing of Christie's East, the house's Rockefeller Plaza division inaugurates a series of "House Sales" appealing to buyers looking for primarily decorative items. (Christie's plans to continue to hold auctions in such areas as maritime arts and memorabilia, formerly held at Christie's East, at the main location.) The two days of sales feature four hundred and fifty lots of porcelain, silver, rugs, paintings, European furniture, and other objects, selected by the designer Jeffrey Bilhuber. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

SWANN
Jan. 31 at 10:30 A.M.: "Old Master Drawings," an auction of works by Italian, Flemish, Dutch, and French artists (including Pierre-Paul Prud'hon's "Landscape of Trees Against a Distant Hill and Two Figures," estimated to bring up to fifteen thousand dollars). (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
"Il Barbiere di Siviglia," with Ruth Ann Swenson, Juan Diego Flórez, Dwayne Croft, John Del Carlo, and Simone Alaimo; Yves Abel conducts. (Jan. 30 at 8 and Feb. 2 at 1:30.) ♦ The final performance this season of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's majestic 1982 production of **"Idomeneo,"** with Hei-Kyung Hong, Alexandra Deshorties, Anne Sofie von Otter, Plácido Domingo, and Mark Oswald; Scott Bergeson. (Jan. 31 at 8.) ♦ Jonathan Miller's production of **"Le Nozze di Figaro,"** with Soile Isokoski (as the Countess), Korliss Uecker, Kristine Jepson, Peter Mattei, and Ferruccio Furlanetto (in the title role); Donald Runnicles. (Feb. 1 and Feb. 4 at 8.) ♦ **"Tosca,"** with Sylvie Valayre, Richard Leech, and James Morris; Daniel Oren. (Feb. 2 and Feb. 5 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

"THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK"
Encompass Opera Theatre presents its final performances of Grigori Frid's one-woman opera, with the soprano Dunja Pechstein. Nancy Rhodes is the director; Sybille Werner conducts. (Connelly Theatre, 220 E. 4th St. 206-1515. Jan. 31 and Feb. 1-2 at 8 and Feb. 3 at 3.)

OPERA NOVA: "CEPHALE ET PROCRIS"
Though little-known today, Elisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre, a harpsichord virtuoso and a favorite court musician of Louis XIV, was a leading progressive French composer of the Baroque era, counting Lully and Marais among her colleagues. As part of Opera Nova's "Under Construction" series, which showcases works in progress by women composers, the company presents excerpts from Susan Stoderl's English-language chamber version of Jacquet's 1694 *tragédie lyrique*; two song cycles by Stoderl will also be performed. (Pulse Ensemble Theatre, 432 W. 42nd St. 252-2418. Jan. 31 and Feb. 1-2 at 7:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Even for a composer who revolutionized the symphonic form, Mahler's six-movement Third Symphony is an extravaganza, employing vast resources to weave a vibrant Ives-like collage of popular music and classical traditions. The Philharmonic is joined by the mezzo-soprano Florence Quivar, the women of the Westminster Choir, and the American Boychoir for these performances; Mariss Jansons conducts. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. Jan. 30-31 and Feb. 1-2 at 8.)

ORCHESTRE DE PARIS
Marc-André Dalbavie, the orchestra's composer-in-residence, may rank as a modernist protégé of Boulez, but his recent music has an accessible quality that befits his partially American ancestry. "Color," his latest work, receives its world première in the orchestra's final Carnegie Hall concert, which also features Messiaen's "Les Offrandes Oubliées" and three works by Ravel (including the Piano Concerto, with Pierre-Laurent Aimard). Christoph Eschenbach conducts. (247-7800. Jan. 30 at 8.)

BARCELONA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Music by Roberto Gerhard, Jacques Ibert (the Flute Concerto, with Emmanuel Pahud), and Manuel de Falla ("The Three-Cornered Hat") is featured on the Catalonian orchestra's Carnegie Hall program, conducted by Lawrence Foster. (247-7800. Feb. 1 at 8.)

MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC SYMPHONY
Elizabeth Schulze conducts the orchestra in music by Barber, Prokofiev (the Piano Concerto No. 1, a one-movement blockbuster, with Tereza Lee), and Rimsky-Korsakov ("Scheherazade"). (Borden Auditorium, Broadway at 122nd St. Feb. 1 at 8. No tickets required.)

PHILHARMONIA VIRTUOSI
Richard Kapp conducts a concert mixing concertos by Mozart and Lutoslawski (both with the clarinettist Richard Stoltzman) with music by Inghelbrecht and Haydn (the Symphony No. 95 in C Minor). (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Feb. 2 at 7.)

AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA
Since commissioning Philip Glass's Violin Concerto, in 1987, the A.C.O. has been one of his most consistent champions; in celebration of the composer's sixty-fifth birthday, Dennis Russell Davies conducts a program that reflects both Glass's social activism and his profound affection for the expansive rhythms of Indian music. Along with the première of the Symphony No. 6, a work with an antinuclear text by Allen Ginsberg (sung by Lauren Flanigan), the orchestra performs "Passages," a collaborative piece written with Ravi Shankar (in a new arrangement, featuring the Raschèr Saxophone Quartet). (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Feb. 3 at 3. **Note:** As part of Carnegie's "Making Music" series, at Weill Recital Hall, Ara Guzelimian hosts a discussion with Glass along with a concert of the composer's smaller works; the performers include the Kronos Quartet. Feb. 3 at 7:30.)

ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA
Riccardo Chailly leads the eminent Amsterdam orchestra in the first of two concerts at Carnegie Hall, featuring Prokofiev's second suite from "Romeo and Juliet," Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No. 1 (with Hilary Hahn), and Tristan Keuris's "Three Preludes." (247-7800. Feb. 5 at 8.)

RECITALS

STEVEN THARP
In his farewell concert as organist of St. Bartholomew's Church, Tharp presents a program celebrating American composers, including works by Leo Sowerby, Donald Erb, and Leonard Bernstein (a new arrangement, for piano, organ, and percussion, of his Symphony No. 2, "The Age of Anxiety"). (Park Ave. at 51st St. Jan. 30 at 7:30. No tickets required.)

"INTERPRETATIONS" SERIES:
DONALD KNAACK AND INGRAM MARSHALL
Knaack, known around town as "the Junkman," has made a career out of composing for found objects and discarded materials and playing on them, too; Marshall is a lauded American minimalist

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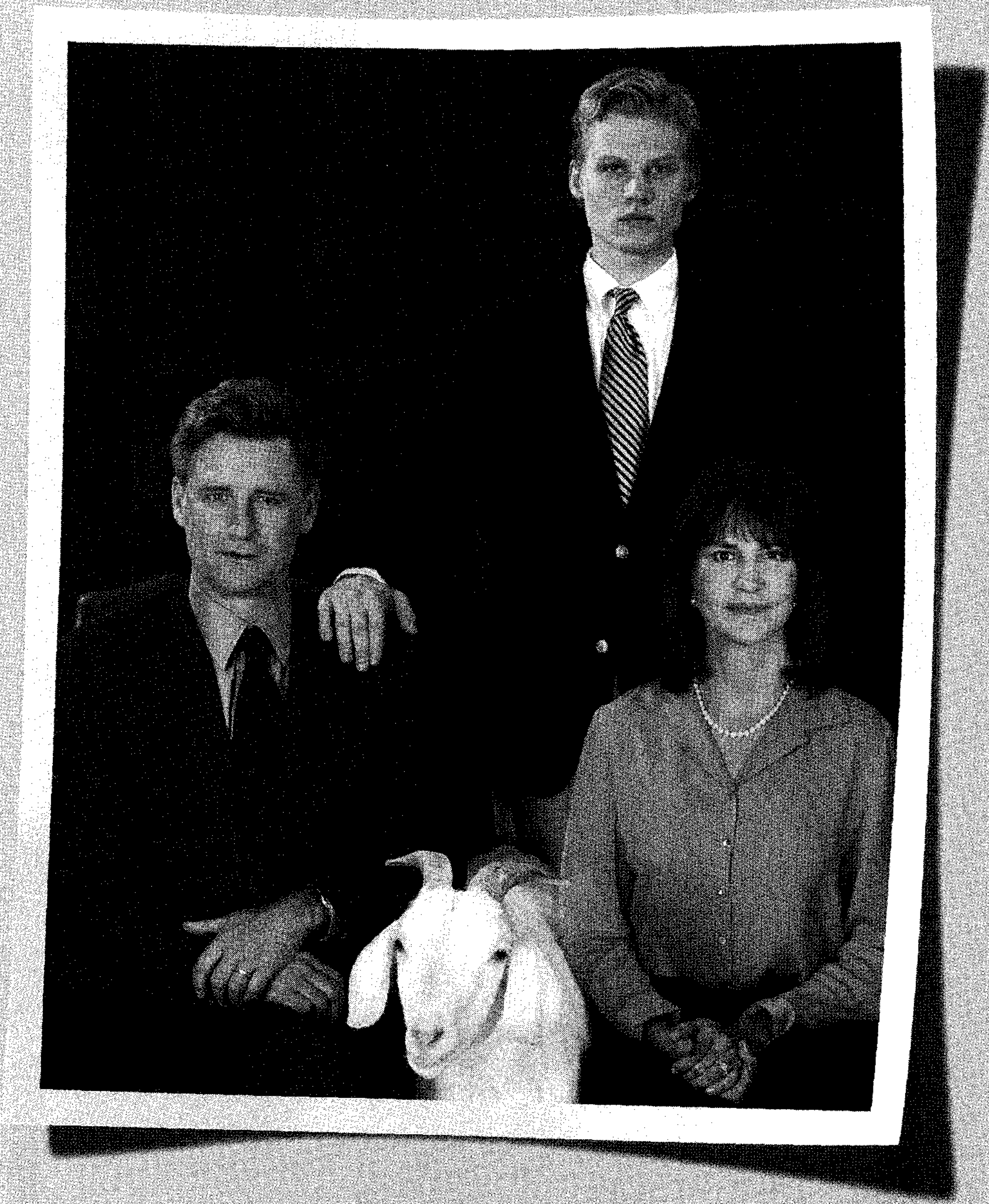

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whose wise and gentle music is quietly making its way into the repertory. The two composers share a program at Merkin Concert Hall, with Marshall's electronic sounds accompanied by a trio of oboe, piano, and guitar. (129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Jan. 31 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC
Two concerts coördinated by the cellist Ronald Thomas. Jan. 31 and Feb. 1 at 7:30: Music by Martinů, Schubert, and Mendelssohn (the Piano Trio No. 1 in D Minor), performed by Thomas, the flutist Carol Wincenc, and others. ♦ Feb. 2 at 7:30 and Feb. 3 at 4: The pianist Mihae Lee and the violinist Ani Kavafian join Thomas for a program of Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms (the Piano Trio No. 2 in C Major). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
The Society presents a collaborative program with the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, featuring works set to music by Mendelssohn, Shostakovich, Beethoven, and Kurtág; the musicians include the Orion String Quartet. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5788. Jan. 31 and Feb. 1-2 at 8 and Feb. 3 at 5. For more information, see Dance.)

NEW JUILLIARD ENSEMBLE: "TWELVE TONES AND BEYOND"
Joel Sachs, the ensemble's director, concludes a six-concert series with three programs that explore the stylistically diverse music of three generations of composers—including Boulez, Ligeti, and Kurtág—who have advanced the possibilities of Schoenberg's twelve-tone revolution with distinction and flair. The final concert, featuring the Juilliard Orchestra conducted by Reinbert de Leeuw, includes a rare performance of "Connotations," one of Aaron Copland's most controversial works. (Juilliard Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. Jan. 30-31 and Feb. 1 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406.)

ST. LUKE'S CHAMBER ENSEMBLE: "CULTURAL INFLUENCES"
Works by three American composers of diverse backgrounds—Tania León (Cuba), Nicholas Maw (Great Britain), and Zhou Long (China)—share the program with the Violoncello Sonata by George Crumb, the Appalachian genius whose mystical music has absorbed a host of exotic influences. Joan Tower hosts. (Dia Center for the Arts, 548 W. 22nd St. 594-6100. Feb. 2 at 2.)

SUNDAYS ON THE ISLAND
The violinist Min Young Kim and the pianist Reiko Uchida team up for a program of Mozart and Brahms, held at City Island's charming country inn, Le Refuge. A reception follows. (620 City Island Ave., the Bronx. Feb. 3 at 12:30. For more information, call 927-9194.)

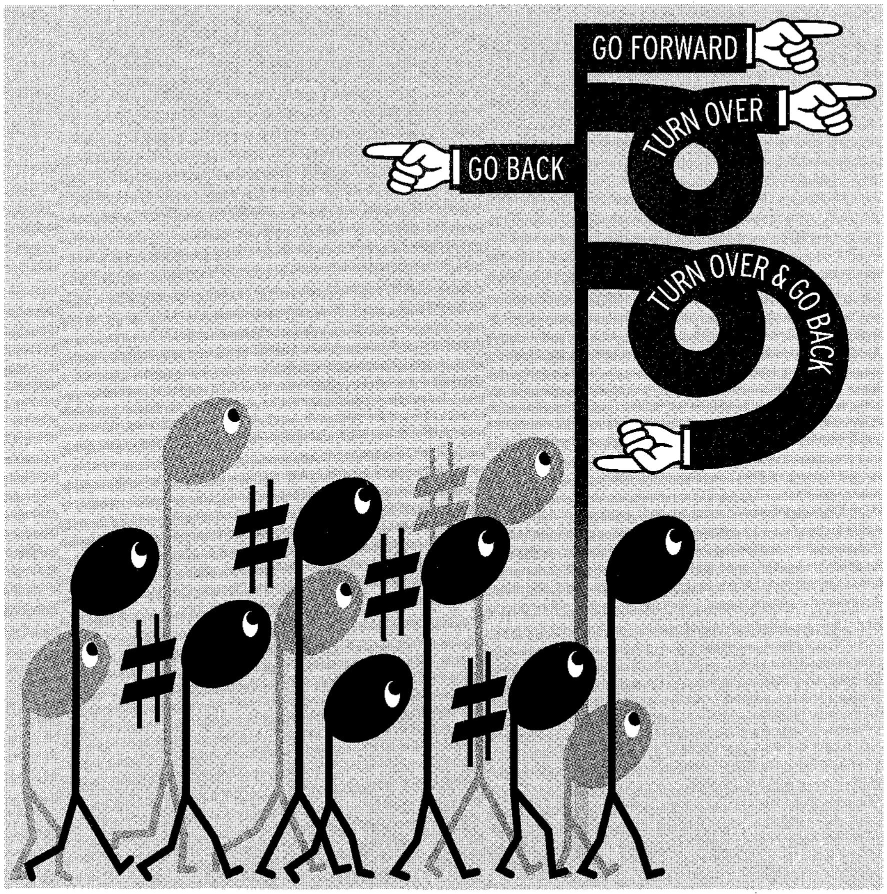
BROOKLYN FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC
The baritone Randall Scarlata and the pianist Cameron Stowe, two gifted young exponents of art song, perform music by Schubert, Chanler (the terse and touching "Eight Epitaphs"), Ravel, and Fine, along with songs with viola obbligato (provided by Pierre Constant) by Brahms and Bridge. (Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, Lafayette Ave. at S. Oxford St. 718-855-3053. Feb. 3 at 3.)

KENT TRITLE
Tritle, the organist of the New York Philharmonic, presents a recital of works by Bach, Liszt, Vierne, and the New York première of Stephen Paulus's "Triptych." (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 288-2520. Feb. 3 at 4.)

MUSIC AT THE FRICK COLLECTION
The guitarist Roberto Aussel presents a program of music by Sor, Rodrigo, Piazzolla (the Five Pieces for Guitar, which are dedicated to him), and others. (1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. Feb. 3 at 5.)

MUSIC AT MERKIN CONCERT HALL
Feb. 3 at 8: Constantinos Kitsopoulos conducts a concert in tribute to the late Iannis Xenakis, the maverick Greek modernist whose works balanced a rigorous structuralism with a fierce and passionate humanity. The program features such works as "Kai" and "Phlegra"; the performers include the New York Philharmonic cellist Maria Kitsopoulos. ♦ Feb. 6 at 8: The pianist Jeremy Denk is the guest artist for the latest concert of the young string ensemble Concertante, which features music by Mozart, Dohnányi (the Piano Quintet in C Minor), and the première of a work by Sheila Silver, "Moon Prayer." (129 W. 67th St. 501-3330.)

WINDSCAPE
The wind quintet, artists-in-residence at the Manhattan School of Music, performs music by J. S. Bach, J. C. Bach, and Mozart (including the Quintet for Piano and Winds, with Jeremy Denk). (Borden Auditorium, Broadway at 122nd St. Feb. 4 at 8. No tickets required.)



TONE POEMS *Now that the controversial technique of twelve-tone composition—in which a composer manipulates a row of pitches instead of writing in a tonal key—no longer dominates contemporary music, the works of three generations of composers who embraced it can be heard afresh. Joel Sachs and the New Juilliard Ensemble perform some of the best of them at the Juilliard Theatre, Jan. 30–31 and Feb. 1.*

NIGEL HOLMES

JUPITER SYMPHONY CHAMBER PLAYERS
The music of Saint-Saëns—limpid, fastidious, charming—was a favorite of Jens Nygaard's; the chamber series dedicated to his memory presents a selection of the composer's finest works, including the Septet, the Oboe Sonata (with Robert Ingliss), and the Clarinet Sonata (with Vadim Lando). (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 799-1259. Feb. 5 at 2 and 8.)

KALICHSTEIN-LAREDO-ROBINSON TRIO
Arnold Steinhardt and Michael Tree, the first violinist and the violist of the Guarneri Quartet, join the trio for a performance of Shostakovich's Piano Quintet, on a program that also includes music by Beethoven and Mendelssohn. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 415-5500. Feb. 5-6 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"MODERN HUMORIST LIVE"
The satirical Web site presents an evening of sketch comedy and standup routines, with Todd Barry, David Rakoff, Patrick Borelli, and others. (Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. 219-3055. Jan. 31 at 7:30 and 9.)

READINGS
Jan. 31 at 7: By Sebastian Faulks, from his new novel, "On Green Dolphin Street." (Lenox Hill Bookstore, 1018 Lexington Ave., near 73rd St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Feb. 2 at 8: Stephen King, Pat Conroy, John Grisham, and Peter Straub read from their work in an evening to benefit Frank Muller, an actor and audiobook narrator who suffered a debilitating motorcycle accident in November of last year. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824.) ♦ Feb. 3 at 3: The actors Russell Oberlin and Richard Edelman lead a dramatic reading of Books I and II of John Milton's epic "Paradise Lost." (German Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Paul, 315 W. 22nd St. Tickets at the door. Note: The performance will be repeated on Feb. 10 at 3.) ♦ Feb. 4 at 8:15: By the poets Louise Glück and Karl Kirchwey. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 415-5500.)

TALKS
Jan. 30: The crime-fiction novelist Elmore Leonard, who just published his thirty-seventh book, "Tishomingo Blues," conducts two conversations. The first, at 5:30, is with the journalist Pete Hamill at Housing Works Used Book Café. (126 Crosby St. No tickets necessary.) The second, at 8, is with the writer S. J. Rozan. (Rockefeller University, York Ave. at 66th St. For more information, call 415-5500.) ♦ Feb. 2 at 2: Amy Godine discusses "Dreaming of Timbuctoo," an exhibition she curated at the Brooklyn Public Library about mid-nineteenth-century African-American homesteaders in the Adirondacks. (Brooklyn Public Library, Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn. 718-230-2100.)

MOVIES OPENING

BIRTHDAY GIRL
A romantic comedy with Nicole Kidman as a Russian mail-order bride and Ben Chaplin as the British bank clerk who sends away for her. Jez Butterworth directed. Opening Feb. 1.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
Frederick Wiseman's latest documentary, a study of domestic abuse and the institutions that try to prevent it. Opening Jan. 30. (Film Forum.)

SLACKERS
A college dweeb (Jason Schwartzman) blackmails three chronic cheaters in order to meet his dream girl (James King) in a comedy directed by Dewey Nicks. Opening Feb. 1.

THE SON'S ROOM
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

FILM NOTES

AMÉLIE
A waifish Parisienne discovers her mission in life: to bring unexpected happiness to others, and so to herself. Such is the story of Amélie (Audrey Tautou), and the simplicity of it appears to have touched a universal nerve. Tautou is clearly a find, although one wonders what Mathieu Kassovitz, who plays the object of her affection, made of his role; it was Kassovitz who, in 1995, yanked French cinema up to date with his baring of ethnic hostilities in "La Haine." The Paris of this movie lies at the other extreme, although what nags at you most is not the neighborly charm but the itchy, unsettled manner of the director, Jean-Pierre Jeunet. How far should we trust a plea for benevolence when it feels like a box of tricks? In French.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/5/01.) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Paris, and 34th Street Theatre.)

A BEAUTIFUL MIND
If you think the title stinks, try the movie. Russell Crowe plays John Nash, a real-life mathematician whose most radical work was produced in his early twenties and who shared the 1994 Nobel Prize for Economics at the age of sixty-six. In between lay years of darkness, during which Nash was assailed by paranoid schizophrenia. When it comes to the delicate matter of his delusions, this earnest movie, written by Akiva Goldsman and directed by Ron Howard, pulls a flagrant scam: whole characters and episodes are presented as urgently authentic, only to be revealed as figments of a cracked imagination. Crowe pulls out the stops, but he looks too bullish and controlled for such a pitiable victim. On safer ground, Ed Harris lends his icy eyes to the role of a Cold War spymaster. The movie grinds on forever until it bumps into redemption; the best reason to stay with it is Jennifer Connelly, who smolders and suffers to perfection as Nash's weary wife. Math skills not required.—*A.L.* (1/7/02) (Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

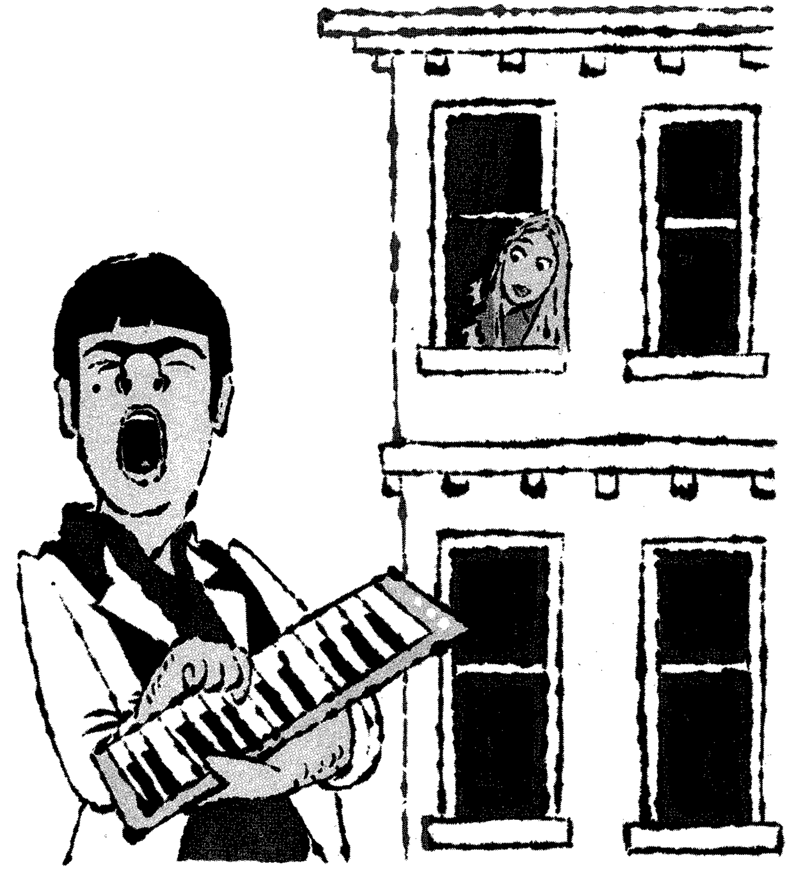
BLACK HAWK DOWN
This account of the ill-fated 1993 Special Forces action in Mogadishu, Somalia, which resulted in the death of eighteen Americans, is exceptionally violent but also truthful to the pain and disorder of battle. It's very clearly directed by Ridley Scott, who allows you to see where the different groups of men are fighting in relation to one another. The movie suggests that despite the casualties the battle was not a total failure but rather a demonstration of strength—the men were killed, in part, because they stayed in the danger zone to rescue survivors from the two helicopters that were shot down. With Sam Shepard, Tom Sizemore, and Josh Hartnett, all submerging themselves in the business at hand. Ken Nolan, adapting Mark Bowden's book, achieves the right tone of matter-of-factness, resolution, and defiance.—*David Denby* (12/24 & 31/01) (Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

BROTHERHOOD OF THE WOLF
A genre-busting treat—part costume drama, part martial-arts horror film—concerning a ferocious, man-eating beast that roams the mountains of eighteenth-century France. The film, directed energetically by Christophe Gans, gets the jolts started with the gruesome death of a peasant girl, which is imaginatively taken from the opening scene of "Jaws." Gans casts his film with gorgeous performers (Samuel Le Bihan as the naturalist sent to investigate, Monica Bellucci as a mysterious courtesan), and his eye-candy sets and thoroughly fruity ideas pack the film with enough outré juxtapositions to make Baz Luhrmann blush. In French.—*Bruce Diones* (84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

CONTEMPT
A ravishing new print brightens the glow of greatness which has always surrounded Jean-Luc Godard's willful and obsessive 1963 movie. It tells the story of Jerry Prokosch (Jack Palance), a gaunt monster of a producer who is putting together a film of the Odyssey; his director, Fritz Lang (playing himself); his screenwriter, Paul (Michel Piccoli); and Paul's wife, Camille (Brigitte Bardot), who falls for Jerry—she is a Penelope who couldn't wait for her wanderer to return. The picture is not simply an acid satire on filmmaking but a larger look at the way in which we helplessly cast others as the unwilling co-stars in our own lives. It sports the nimbleness of comedy while strolling defiantly in the direction of the tragic, and it emerges, after thirty-nine years, as quite inexplicably moving. In French.—*A.L.* (Florence Gould Hall; Feb. 5.)

GOSFORD PARK
This Agatha Christie-style houseparty murder mystery, set in 1932, plants itself deep into social reality and achieves the kind of candor about class and sex that Christie would never have been capable of. The idea came from Bob Balaban and Robert Altman; the brilliant screenplay was written by Julian Fellowes. Altman directs an enormous cast with lightness and speed and a masterly ability to pull the many little pieces of intrigue together into a coherent whole. Casually, the movie chronicles the end of the rigid British class system and the liberation of the working class through popular entertainment. The once-in-a-lifetime cast includes Michael Gambon, Kristin Scott Thomas, Maggie Smith, Jeremy Northam, and Charles Dance as the swells, and Helen Mirren, Eileen Atkins, Alan Bates, Clive Owen, and Emily Watson as the servants. Bob Balaban plays a Hollywood producer of Charlie Chan mysteries, and Ryan Phillippe is his valet, a cherub-faced erotic toy that anyone can play with.—*D.D.* (1/14/02) (Chelsea West, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

I AM SAM
An awkwardly sincere attempt to come to terms with an impossible subject. Sam (Sean Penn), a retarded Santa Monica man, has a brilliant daughter (Dakota Fanning) who reaches the age of seven and begins to surpass him; the authorities want to separate them, but father and daughter don't want to be



Opening February 1, Jason Schwartzman and James King in "Slackers."

separated. Penn, openmouthed, starting and stammering, plunges deep into Sam's confusions and his innate good-heartedness. The trouble is, Penn doesn't know when to stop: he does every poetic movement or despairing emotion again and again. The writer-director Jessie Nelson also suffers from a surfeit of goodness. In portraying the entire way of life of Sam and his "challenged" friends, she overtaxes the audience's kindest impulses. Michelle Pfeiffer shows up as Sam's high-strung lawyer—a beautiful striver, brilliant and accomplished, but an unhappy wreck. Pfeiffer is so likable in the role that she almost saves the movie. Almost.—*D.D.* (1/28/02) (Cinema 3rd Avenue, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.)

IN THE BEDROOM
In Camden, Maine, a twenty-one-year-old college student, Frank (Nick Stahl), is having a headlong summer affair with a local woman, Natalie (Marisa Tomei). Natalie is separated from her husband (William Mapother), the loutish scion of a prominent local family. When the husband kills his rival, Frank's hypercivilized parents (Tom Wilkinson and Sissy Spacek) begin to consider vengeance as a way of saving themselves from destroying each other. This Sophoclean tale, fleshed out from an elliptical short story by Andre Dubus, draws its strength from minute observation of settings and moods, and from a gradual tightening of the winch. Much of it is very quiet (the first-time director, Todd Field, is an actor and a photographer), but when it explodes, the violence actually means something.—*D.D.* (11/26/01) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea West, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and 34th Street Theatre.)

KANDAHAR
The latest film by the Iranian director Mohsen Makhmalbaf couldn't be better timed. The story is just a series of gestures: Nafas (Nelofer Pazira), an Afghan woman who left her country as a teenager, returns to look for her suicidal sister. On the way to Kandahar (conceived as a state of mind as much as a place), she runs into a variety of helpers disguising themselves to avoid persecution by the Taliban—men in burkas, a boy faking an inability to read the Koran, a benevolent African-American wearing a false beard. The sequences don't have much continuity, but Makhmalbaf turns the desolation of the country into scenes of iconic power. In Farsi and English.—*D.D.* (12/10/01) (State and Sunshine Cinema.)

LANTANA
The metaphorical title refers to a plant bearing exotic flowers (and hidden thorns beneath). The movie, directed by Ray Lawrence, concerns four sets of married couples whose lives are in various states of disarray and a missing person's investigation that will connect them all. Anthony LaPaglia is especially memorable as the guilt-ridden chief detective, but all the veteran actors (including Geoffrey Rush and Barbara Hershey) have engaging roles. There's an Altman-like brio to the ensemble cast which keeps the movie spinning intriguingly to its conclusion.—*B.D.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Union Square.)

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING
It takes about forty-five minutes for the movie to emerge from Sir Ian McKellen's beard (he plays the garrulous wizard Gandalf), but once it does, this enormous hunk of quasi-medieval myth, based on the work of J. R. R. Tolkien, is consistently beautiful and exciting. The New Zealander director Peter Jackson, who wrote the screenplay with Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens, works with enough dramatic tension and pictorial grandeur to sustain us through long periods of complicated exposition and heavy bouts of swordplay. Elijah Wood, of the troubled blue eyes, plays the hobbit Frodo. He is accompanied in this quest by Gandalf, two noble human warriors (Viggo Mortensen and Sean Bean), an intemperate, black-bearded dwarf (John Rhys-Davies), and various scampering halflings. The New Zealand landscapes—jagged mountains, thickety glens, limitless plains—add to the aura of enchantment.—*D.D.* (12/24 & 31/01) (Chelsea Cinemas,

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

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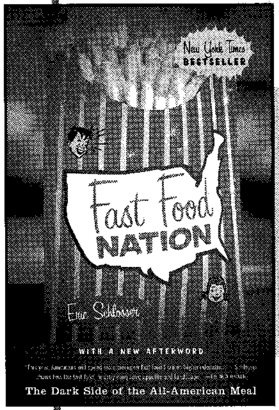
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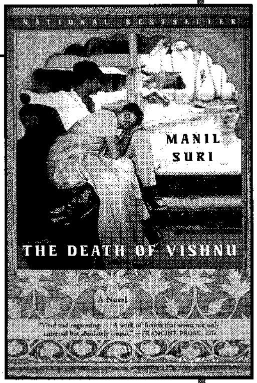

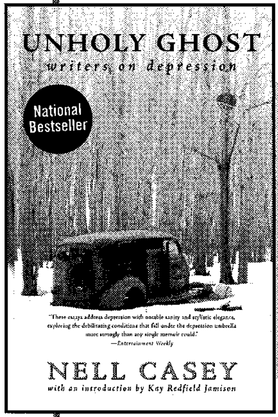

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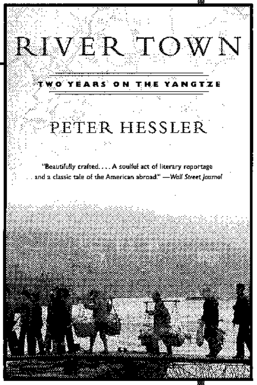

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THE MAJESTIC

A fiasco from the director Frank Darabont. Jim Carrey plays a hack screenwriter who, in the early fifties, runs into trouble with the House Un-American Activities Committee. Out for a drive, he gets bonked on the head, suffers from amnesia, and winds up in a small town on the California coast where he's taken for a missing war hero. Since we know he's not a war hero, we feel only chagrin and impatience as he's lionized by the town. The movie appears to be a square version of what Preston Sturges pulled off as hilarious satire in "Hail the Conquering Hero," in 1944. Darabont paces the inert material more slowly than the funeral of Edward VII, and Carrey, unable to use his lank, big body, gives a dull performance.—*D.D.* (1/28/02) (Empire 25.)

MONSTER'S BALL

Marc Forster's movie delivers an unworkable paradox: the characters are inarticulate, damaged people who have led heedless and tragic lives—portrayed with bitter realism—and yet the plotting is sheer Hollywood in its schemes and coincidences. Billy Bob Thornton is the Georgia corrections officer who conducts the execution of the husband (Sean "Puffy" Combs) of a local waitress (Halle Berry) and then falls in love with the widow. The slow, reticent dramaturgy has its moments of authenticity, especially in the balanced interracial romance: Thornton is quiet and affecting and Berry acts up a storm. Written by Milo Addica and Will Rokos.—*D.D.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, 72nd Street East, and Sunshine Cinema.)

MULHOLLAND DRIVE

A woman wanders away from a car wreck and into a strange house. Little old people scurry under the foot of a door, squeaking like mice. Yes, it's a David Lynch project. This one began life as a TV pilot; you can just imagine the aghast faces of the network executives as they saw what they had commissioned. The completed elongated weirdness, stretching to two and a half hours, feels discomfortingly at home on the larger screen; if you ever wanted to see an epic horror-soap, this is what it would look like. Many established Lynch motifs are in place, most of them summoned from one corner or another of the nineteen-fifties: the innocent blonde (Naomi Watts), the baffled brunette (Laura Elena Harring), the clueless cop (Robert Forster). Addicts of the director will tie themselves in knots trying to pick the lock of the film; the rest of us can lie back and enjoy the spooking.—*A.L.* (10/15/01) (Cinema Village, Empire 25, and 59th Street East Cinema.)

OCEAN'S ELEVEN

Steven Soderbergh's remake of the 1960 Vegas heist movie bristles with energy. Instead of the ineffably casual Rat Pack, Soderbergh has a cast of hard-working guys: George Clooney in the old Frank Sinatra role as the criminal mastermind, Brad Pitt, Matt Damon, Don Cheadle, Andy Garcia, and, in colorful support, Elliott Gould and Carl Reiner. Soderbergh constructs the movie in layers with lines of terse dialogue winging on and off the screen and fitting perfectly together. The robbery itself also depends on many interlocking pieces of theatre—moments of imposture and fakery which allow the gang members to breach the inner sanctum of the casinos. Despite all the cleverness and good humor, however, the movie peters out, and, by the end, you may wonder what it's all for.—*D.D.* (12/10/01) (84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

ORANGE COUNTY

Mike White and Jake Kasdan, two of the talents who gave us the achingly nerdy television series "Freaks & Geeks," churn out a power-pop teen comedy for MTV Productions. The movie is loaded with cameos, the best of which is Lily Tomlin as a memory-impaired guidance counselor. When one of her lapses prevents the affable senior-class president (Colin Hanks) from gaining acceptance to Stanford, he decides to argue his case in person, enlisting the help of his crunchy girlfriend (Schuyler Fisk) and his sweaty armpit of a brother (Jack Black). Black, a volcanic pudgeball, spends most of his screen time snapping wisecracks in his tighty whities; needless to say, he's the funniest thing on display. In the movie's mellower moments, it slips in some clever jokes about the writing life and more than a few homoerotic asides. Kasdan and White are clearly having a lot of fun imagining Orange County as a land of the hopelessly vapid: who wouldn't want to attend a high school where the teacher says "Juliet?" and the students respond: "Claire Danes."—*Michael Agger* (First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS

After the brilliance of "Rushmore," his levelheaded look at the gifts of a misfit, where could Wes Anderson go next? In the event, he has broadened his scope to take in an entire family of misfits: the Tenenbaums, residing in their colorful town house like kooky modern leftovers from the age of Edith Wharton—an age of innocence indeed, despite the ill will that gusts around. The parents (Gene Hackman and Anjelica Huston) raised three overachieving children (Ben Stiller, Luke Wilson, and Gwyneth Paltrow) and then separated. We are here for the aftermath: the daughter's fading marriage to a bearded melancholic (Bill Murray), and other sunderings and patchings-up. The movie is packed tight with strong, if baffled, feelings, and yet we could be watching it through glass; Anderson specializes in the cool, astringent gaze, and for anyone sick of Hollywood heart-melters this could be the antidote.—*A.L.* (12/17/01) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Eastside Playhouse, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

Selma Blair in Todd Solondz's new drama, "Storytelling."

ADRIAN TOMINE

THE SHIPPING NEWS

As Quoyle, a man who feels he's been drowning his entire life, Kevin Spacey speaks in a disembodied voice just above a whisper, and he's so tearful and cringing that he seems to have stepped out of the pages of an early Dickens novel. This flamboyantly masochistic display of humility nearly destroys any pleasure to be found in Lasse Hallström's fluent adaptation of E. Annie Proulx's novel. Most of the picture takes place in a Newfoundland fishing village, where the chilled inhabitants make a sweet little community. Their misery has a comic lilt to it: life is so harsh that there's nothing to do but tell wild tales and make jokes in the gray light. The cast includes Pete Postlethwaite, Scott Glenn, Cate Blanchett as a floozy, Judi Dench as Spacey's tough-minded aunt, and Julianne Moore as his new friend. Everyone has a secret.—*D.D.* (1/28/02) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

SHOOT THE PIANO PLAYER

This 1960 François Truffaut movie busts out all over—and that's what's wonderful about it. Charlie, the sad-faced little piano player (Charles Aznavour), is the thinnest-skinned of modern heroes: each time he has cared about someone he has suffered, and now he just wants to be "out of it." This is a comedy about melancholia—perhaps the only comedy about melancholia. Truffaut is freely inventive here—a young director willing to try almost anything—and Charlie's encounters with the world are filled with good and bad jokes, bits from old Sacha Guitry films, clowns and thugs, tough kids, songs and fantasy and snow scenes, and homage to the American Grade B gangster pictures of the forties and fifties. In French.—*Pauline Kael* (Moving Image; Feb. 2-3.)

STORYTELLING

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE THIRD MAN

The most famous collaboration of the director Carol Reed and the screenwriter Graham Greene has the structure of a good suspense thriller and an atmosphere of baroque, macabre decadence. The simple American, Joseph Cotten, arrives in postwar Vienna to meet an old friend, only to be told that the friend has been killed in an accident. In trying to discover the facts, Cotten learns so much about his friend that when he finally finds him alive he wants him dead. Orson Welles's portrait of the friend, Harry Lime, is a study of corruption—evil, witty, unreachable. There is an ambiguity about our relation to the Cotten character: he is alone against the forces of the city and, in a final devastating stroke, he is even robbed of the illusion that the girl (Alida Valli) is interested in him, yet his illusions are so commonplace that his disillusion does not strike us deeply. Greene has made him a shallow, ineffectual, well-meaning American. The zither music is by Anton Karas; originally released in 1949.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; Feb. 1-3.)

TOUCH OF EVIL

There have been four subtly different versions of Orson Welles's ornate thriller since it first came out, in 1958. The fourth, released in 1998, should be the last: working from a memo that Welles wrote at the time, after the studio had messed with his original cut, the producer Rick Schmidlin and the editor Walter Murch have come as close to honoring the director's intentions as anyone ever will. At first glance, little has changed; the titles (and Henry Mancini's brassy theme) have disappeared from the celebrated opening shot, but from then on the basic thrust of this Mexican border tale (filmed in Venice, California) remains intact. We still have the manly Vargas (Charlton Heston) struggling to solve the case of the car bomb while his wife (Janet Leigh) feels the heat from a gang of local hoods; we are still thrown by the freakish cameos by Zsa Zsa Gabor and Mercedes McCambridge and the horrific slaying—a kind of jazz strangulation—of the fleshy Grandi (Akim Tamiroff); and, of course, we still see Welles himself as police chief Hank Quinlan, looming over the action like a Falstaff gone to seed. His scenes with Marlene Dietrich, as the brothel keeper, have nothing to do with the plot and everything to do with the rotting heart of this amazing fable: the apotheosis of pulp.—*A.L.* (Film Forum; Feb. 1-3.)

WHAT TIME IS IT THERE?
A young Taipei watch vender reluctantly sells a pretty Paris-bound girl his own watch, then finds himself longing for her, so much so that he begins setting the clocks all over the city to Paris time. Meanwhile, his recently widowed mother is looking for signs that her dead husband has returned to her. The director Tsai Ming-liang's haunting meditation on loneliness and time is a lovely, mordant piece of moviemaking. His immobile camera compositions and bare-bones use of dialogue allow the performers to play out their complicated emotional lives with a dramatic stillness and a dotty humor that is, at times, breathtaking. In Mandarin, Taiwanese, and French.—*B.D.* (Cinema Village.)

ALSO PLAYING

THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO
Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

ITALIAN FOR BEGINNERS
Angelika Film Center, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and New York Twin.

METROPOLIS
Empire 25 and Sunshine Cinema.

THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES
East 85th Street, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.

PIÑERO
Lincoln Square and Sunshine Cinema.

WAYDOWNTOWN
Angelika Film Center.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600).
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Feb. 17: "Across 110th Street: Images of Harlem on Film." Feb. 2 at 1: "Cotton Comes to Harlem" (1970, Ossie Davis). ♦ Feb. 2 at 4: "A Rage in Harlem" (1991, Bill Duke). ♦ Feb. 3 at 2: "Aaron Loves Angela" (1975, Gordon Parks, Jr.). ♦ Feb. 3 at 4: "Moon Over Harlem" (1939, Edgar G. Ulmer). ♦ Repertory night. Feb. 2-3 at 6:30: "Shoot the Piano Player" (†).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Feb. 1-3 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10 and Feb. 4-5 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Loners" (2000, David Ondricek; in Czech).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through Feb. 7: "Greatest Hits." Jan. 30 at 1, 4:45, and 8:30: "Diary of a Chambermaid" (1964, Luis Buñuel; in French). ♦ Jan. 30 at 2:50, 6:35, and 10:20: "Jules and Jim" (1961, François Truffaut; in French). ♦ Jan. 31 at 1:30, 4:55, and 8:20: "Salesman" (1968, Charlotte Zwerin and the Maysles brothers). ♦ Jan. 31 at 3:10, 6:35, and 10: "Grey Gardens" (1976, the Maysles brothers et al.). ♦ Feb. 1-3 at 1:40, 5:40, and 9:40: "Touch of Evil" (†). ♦ Feb. 1-3 at 3:45 and 7:45: "The Third Man" (†). ♦ Feb. 4-5 at 1:40, 5:30, and 9:20: "Walkabout" (1971, Nicolas Roeg). ♦ Feb. 4-5 at 3:25 and 7:20: "Picnic at Hanging Rock" (1975, Peter Weir).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Films that portray *la vie d'artiste*. Feb. 5 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Contempt" (†).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through Jan. 31: A tribute to the Italian actress Anna Magnani. Jan. 31 at 2:30: "The Blind Girl of Sorrento" (1934, Nunzio Malasomma; in Italian). ♦ Jan. 31 at 6: "Mamma Roma" (1962, Pier Paolo Pasolini; in Italian). ♦ Through Feb. 21: "Alexander Sokurov: A Retrospective." All films are in Russian. Feb. 1 at 2:30 and Feb. 4 at 6: "Second Circle" (1990). ♦ Feb. 1 and Feb. 5 at 6: "Days of the Eclipse" (1988). ♦ Feb. 2 at 2: "Mother and Son" (1997). ♦ Feb. 2 at 5: "Simple Elegy" (1990) and "An Elegy from Russia" (1993). ♦ Feb. 3 at 2: "The Lonely Voice of Man" (1978-87). ♦ Feb. 3 at 5: "Moscow Elegy" (1986-87) and "Hubert Robert, a Fortunate Life" (1996). ♦ Feb. 4 at 2:30: "Oriental Elegy" (1996) and "Dolce" (1999). ♦ Feb. 5 at 2:30: "Mournful Indifference" (1983-87).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through Feb. 7: "Wry Smiles, Suspicious Glances: The Films of Andrzej Munk." All films are in Polish. Jan. 30 at 1 and 5, Jan. 31 at 3:15 and 7:15, and Feb. 5 at 1: "The Men of the Blue Cross" (1955). ♦ Jan. 30 at 2:45 and 8:45; Jan. 31 at 1, 5, and 9; and Feb. 5 at 2:45: "Man on the Tracks" (1956). ♦ Jan. 30 at 6:45 and Feb. 3 at 1:30, 5:15, and 9: "Passenger" (1961-63). ♦ Feb. 1 at 1 and 5:30, Feb. 2 at 2:30 and 8:45, and Feb. 3 at 3: "Eroica" (1958). ♦ Feb. 1 at 3:15 and 9:15, Feb. 2 at 6:20, and Feb. 3 at 6:45: "Bad Luck" (1960). ♦ Feb. 1 at 7:30 and Feb. 2 at 1 and 4:45: "The Last Pictures" (2001, Andrzej Brzozowski).

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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

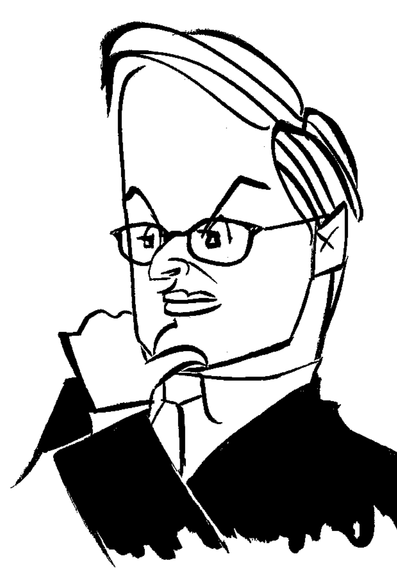
COMMENT
SCIENCE FICTION

The future of the life sciences in America may depend, in some small part, on the opinions of a bioethicist named Dr. Leon R. Kass. Kass, who was trained as a physician, is now a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, on leave from the University of Chicago's Committee on Social Thought. He has devoted a book to "eating and the perfecting of our nature," and has contributed to books with titles like "The Neoconservative Imagination." In August, President Bush appointed him chairman of the new National Bioethics Commission, which the President has asked to be "the conscience of our country" and be his guide on all ethical matters relating to biomedical advances.

At the commission's first meeting, the other week in Washington, Kass opened a discussion not with facts but with fiction. He talked about Nathaniel Hawthorne's tale "The Birthmark," in which a brilliant scientist marries a woman whose extraordinary beauty is marred only by a blemish on her cheek and becomes obsessed with eliminating the imperfection. The story has all the gothic conventions: bubbling beakers, arcane tomes, elixirs of immortality, a stunted, apelike assistant. In the end, the scientist's treatment cures the blemish but kills the wife.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Using literature to warn against the scientific search for perfection is a hallmark of Kass's approach to bioethics. (Hawthorne, Homer, and Huxley are among his touchstones.) So is a reflexive suspicion toward the enterprise of biotechnology. In a series of essays published in the nineteen-seventies, Kass opposed what is now the commonplace practice of in-vitro fertilization. He worried that it could erode traditional marriage and create a baby market, and that children conceived by the process would be stigmatized. (He has since dropped the subject.) Last summer, Kass came to public notice when he advised President Bush on his decision to prohibit the creation of any new stem-cell lines derived from human embryos. Now Kass's commission is deliberating stem-cell research as the Senate begins debate on several bills on human cloning.



Leon Kass

There are two types of human cloning, popularly called reproductive and therapeutic. In both types, a nucleus from a cell is inserted into an unfertilized egg, and the egg takes on that cell's genetic characteristics. In reproductive cloning, the manipulated egg would grow to be a baby that is a genetic copy of the donor. In therapeutic cloning, the manipulated egg grows into a microscopic clump, which provides primitive stem cells, and the process is terminated. Cloned stem cells may one day provide treatments for scores of currently incurable diseases, including juvenile diabetes, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, and spinal-cord paralysis. As the Kass commission met, the National Academy of Sciences, the most august research organization in American science—and one that was also created to advise the federal government—issued a report that called for a ban on reproductive cloning but reaffirmed its support for research on therapeutic cloning.

Unfortunately, the scientific consensus isn't accompanied by a political one. The President opposes all cloning—he told the bioethics commission, "I just don't think it's right"—and Kass has taken a similar position. In a 1998 book, "The Ethics of Human Cloning," he warns that even therapeutic cloning may lead us into a world where science is used for "replicating individuals of great genius, talent, or beauty" or creating "genetically identical humans suitable for research" or for "special missions in peace and war (not excluding espionage)."

Kass's vision is dismally remote from what actually goes on in the nation's laboratories. There are no wild-eyed wizards with perfection potions. Instead, medical scientists stare at diseases against which frustratingly little progress has been made, despite years of dedicated research. While Kass conjures a world of lab-bred James Bonds, two hundred thousand Americans live with spinal-cord injuries, a million and a half have Parkinson's, and four million have Alzheimer's.

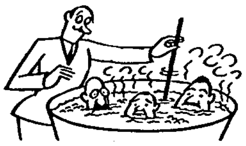
How does Kass defend his hostility toward stem-cell research and cloning? With a doctrine that he calls "the wisdom of repugnance," and which states, basically, that if you find something repugnant—if you just don't think it's right—then it must be wrong. The problem with this argument is that it is impervious to reason and severely constrained by time and place. Whether repugnance really offers wisdom depends, of course, on what you find repugnant. The practice of autopsy, which made modern medicine possible, was for centuries widely considered repugnant. More recently, in 1976, the city of Cambridge, Massachusetts, decided that recombinant-DNA technology was repugnant, and it called for a moratorium on the cloning of genes at institutions such as Harvard and M.I.T. This research became the basis of modern biotechnology. If Cambridge's distaste had been sustained, or shared by San Francisco, we would have been denied many of our most important treatments for cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, and heart disease.

There is, however, a tactical advantage in applying the wisdom of repugnance to the stem-cell debate, in that it skirts the familiar theological argument that a manipulated egg is a human life. It therefore enables the Bush Administration to accommodate the religious right without openly embracing its fundamentalism.

The commission is due to meet a few more times and to publish its proposals by the summer. Its critics have noted that most of the eighteen members are conservatives like Kass who are unlikely to recommend anything that the President would not want to hear. One has to hope that the few working scientists on the commission, such as Dr. Janet D. Rowley, a leukemia expert who is also a member of the National Academy of Sciences, can help shape a medical guideline that is based on fact, not on literature or aesthetics—one that distinguishes real science from science fiction.

—*Jerome Groopman*

VICTUALS
THE NEW YORK BITE

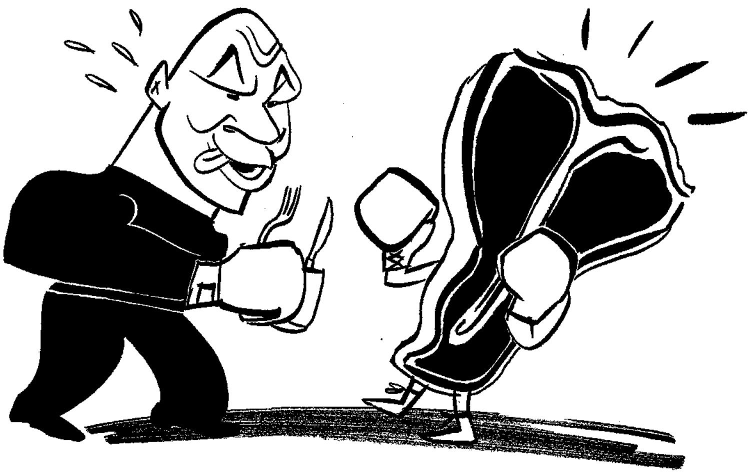


It has been four and a half years since Mike Tyson took a bite out of Evander Holyfield. The incident occurred during a world-title fight in Las Vegas, and, even now, mystery hangs over Tyson's motives for what soon became known as the first televised instance of pay-per-chew. Maybe he tired of the traditional fist technique employed by more sedate combatants and decided, instead, to put his mouth where the money was. If so, he gambled wrong, because that single crunch resulted in a fine of three million dollars: perhaps the most expensive between-meals snack in the history of comestibles.

Last Tuesday, January 22nd, Tyson—vehemently and without prior notice—reasserted his claim to be Heavyweight Chomper of the World. At the Millennium Broadway Hotel, on West Forty-fourth Street, a press conference was held to promote the forthcoming bout between Tyson and Lennox Lewis, the British boxer who currently holds the W.B.C. title. That, at any rate, was the plan, and the organizers had taken the precaution of staging the conference in the hotel's Hudson Theatre, rather than in the more tempting environment of its restaurant. In the event, Tyson reverted to form: spurning the need for cutlery, he made it instantly clear that he would be skipping the Q & A session and heading straight into lunch.

One of Lewis's bodyguards (Why can't boxers defend themselves? Isn't that what boxing is for?) apparently sought to fend off a fast-approaching Tyson, who promptly threw a left. Lewis returned the compliment, whereupon the whole scene turned into early Mack Sennett. During the dustup, it appears that Tyson sank his gnashers—themselves a formidable sight, even in the course of an everyday grin—into a large helping of his opponent. Precisely which cut of raw Englishman he favored is open to debate; reports referred variously to the leg, the left leg, the leg through the pants, and the foot. One of Tyson's trainers, Stacy McKinley, loyally proposed that Lewis had bitten himself in the foot.

But, for connoisseurs of unorthodox cuisine, the day was not yet done. That evening, in a screening room off Times Square, a few lucky critics gathered to watch "Trouble Every Day," the new film by the French director Claire Denis. The movie has provoked outrage in France, although, like most outrageous movies, it will cause few ripples here. To be blunt about it, Béatrice Dalle and Vincent Gallo play cannibals. He is more of a novice, and spends the film dreaming of edible women, whereas she tucks in from the very start. Toward the end, we get to observe Mademoiselle Dalle in action.

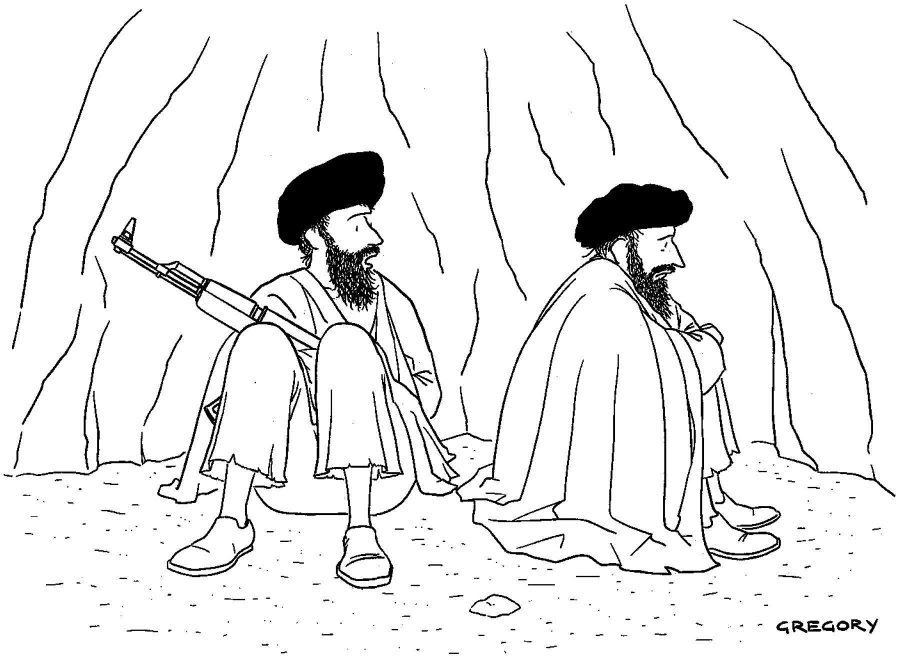


Mike Tyson

Even her fans would agree that she is not so much an actress as a volcanic mouth attached to a fiery reputation; ever since "Betty Blue," Dalle has incarnated our favorite appetites, and we should not be surprised that she has finally succeeded in going à la carte. The scene is just about watchable, and everything fell into place when a low voice whispered, from the back rows of the screening room, the single word "Tyson."

What a match it would be. Tyson vs. Dalle: even Don King would bow his hair in awe at such a prospect. Just imagine the two of them, Betty Blue and Iron Mike, going tooth-to-tooth under the hot lights, with a crowd of twenty thousand literally egging them on, with a handful of bread crumbs to follow. On paper, the contest is hard to call; Mike has the greater number of blowouts under his belt, but anyone who has seen Béatrice dining off fresh teen-ager onscreen knows that this young gourmet can put it away. By the time the two of them are finished with each other, there'll be nothing left but a plate of bones and a couple of paper napkins. It would be premature to say that boxing is over, but one must admit that a new and more nutritious sport may be ready to take its place. Ladies and gentlemen, take your seats: It's Chowtime!

—*Anthony Lane*



"If you still want to belong to an organization dedicated to killing Americans, there's always the tobacco lobby."

• •

THE OLD COUNTRY
YOUR INNER HAGGIS

The Bryant Park Hotel had a Braveheart moment last week: a bagpiper was stationed on the street outside, and, in the subterranean Cellar Bar, swatches of Black Watch tartan decked the chandeliers while girls in short black skirts with tartan sashes served platters of potato-based canapés. The occasion was a party for a new Web site, Ancestralscotland.com, which was created by the Scottish tourism board to encourage Americans of Scots descent to discover their Highland or Lowland heritage. The site is based upon data provided in the 1881 census; a user who believes he may have Scots blood can type in his name—McCoy, say—and discover where, in 1881, the largest populations of real McCoys lived (in Wigtown and Dumbarton). Ancestralscotland.com does not assist with genealogy searches, though it provides links to sites that will; what it does do is help a user find a nice bed-and-breakfast in Clackmannanshire or tell him which golf course now occupies his family's ancestral property.

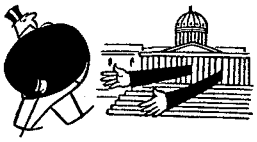
There were, if the handful of men in kilts were anything to go by, at least a few Scots and Scottish-Americans in evidence at the party. They included the towering blond model Kirsty Hume, who comes from Ayr and is something of a highland in herself, and her half-Scottish husband, Donovan Leitch, who was wearing the kilt and black velvet jacket he'd worn on their wedding day, four years ago. They stood near the bar, greeting stray guests. "The Scottish tourist board asked us to do this because our wedding got a lot of attention and Madonna and Guy weren't available," Leitch explained. But the party was not exactly thick with MacDonalds and MacBrides. When Mike Cantley, a red-haired man in a kilt, who is the deputy chairman of the Scottish tourism board, took a microphone and reminded the guests that the following night was Burns' Night—when Scots celebrate Robert Burns's birthday—and that "having a right good hooley is what it's all about," the smattering of applause he received suggested that very few of those present were familiar with the concept of Burns' Night, or, indeed, that of a right good hooley.

This did not, however, prevent partygoers from trying out the Web site just to see whether they might find a Scottish connection. Cees Bosselaar, the former director of tourism for the Netherlands in North America, typed in his name and discovered that there were no Bosselaars anywhere in Scotland in 1881. "I would have been totally flabbergasted to find any," he said. Still, a spirit of multiculturalism was in evidence. "Would you like a caipirinha?" offered one partygoer, a dark-haired, vivacious woman named Judith Seeherman. With Seeherman was Stuart Goldman, a television producer, who decided to take a turn at the computer terminal in spite of Seeherman's low expectations. "Goldman's Jewish," she said. As it happened, the site yielded two references to nineteenth-century Scots Goldmans, and provided links to the tourism Web sites of the districts—Roxburgh and Lanark—from which they came. Goldman seemed quite touched at the discovery.

"Roxburgh—that's my long-lost uncle," he said. "And Lanark—we wondered what happened to him. He took off for a cave in the Highlands." He added that he was not surprised to find them. "Goldman is an acquired name," he said. "Wherever there are civilized people, there are Goldmans."

—*Rebecca Mead*

IS IT SAFE? DEPT.
BACK AT THE HART



On the day last week that the Hart Senate Office Building reopened after three months of quarantine, anyone with questions about anthrax and fumigation could turn to Dr. Gregory Martin, the chief of infectious diseases at Bethesda Naval Hospital. Dr. Martin had been treating the staff of Senator Tom Daschle since October, when Daschle received a letter tainted with anthrax. Now Dr. Martin was spending the afternoon with Daschle's staff members as they returned to their offices. In his dark Navy uniform and white cap, he was the very image of calm and control. Dr. Martin declared that the health risk in the building was extremely small: "It doesn't matter if you're a ninety-year-old lady on chemo, if you have AIDS, if you're pregnant—it doesn't matter." Assurances like these seemed to make him quite popular. "Can Dr. Martin be on our staff?" one young woman asked.

Senate aides reported curious findings, apart from the usual abandoned car keys, cartons of spoiled milk, and yellowing newspapers with bioterror headlines. On the bottom of a toilet seat, one aide discovered logo stickers left by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Coast Guard's National Strike Force—government versions of the "Sanitized" strips found in motel bathrooms. Someone had drawn "Kilroy was here" symbols in black ink on several walls and floors, which returning staffers interpreted as E.P.A. markings denoting that the areas had tested clean. There were also some minor complaints. "They threw my plant in the trash," one aide said. "It smells like a swimming pool," said another. It was true: the faint odor of chlorine-dioxide gas, which the E.P.A. had used to fumigate the building, lingered in the air.

In an office occupied by staffers of Ted Kennedy, a cheer went up. A cleanup crew had cleared out the refrigerator.

Down the hall, a man in a T-shirt, jeans, and sneakers walked into the office of Senator John Breaux carrying a bucket filled with tiny nets and brushes. "I'm here to see the fish," he said. This was Mark Cook, the "tank doctor," who was looking after the health of Breaux's pets—two goldfish and a suckerfish. Breaux had not seen them since he visited his office last fall (after signing a waiver form) to feed them some time-release food capsules. "I'm very surprised they're alive," Cook said. The water in the tank was foul. "I mean, they're hardy fish."

—*Michael Crowley*

POSTSCRIPT
PEGGY LEE

All entertainers have, to use Noël Coward's phrase, a talent to amuse, but Peggy Lee, who died last week at the age of eighty-one, had something else as well: a talent to be amused. She swung with a sense of humor, and handled lyrics with an uncynical knowingness, letting you in on the little secret of whatever song she happened to be singing, or, at least, letting you know that she had a secret. Unlike Frank Sinatra, her peer in musical intelligence, she had a voice that didn't command you to pay attention; it suggested that you might have a lot of fun if you did. There was something about Peggy Lee that didn't invite a listener all the way in, though that quality, instead of being off-putting, made the intimacy she did allow feel special. In one of the songs she wrote for the Disney movie "Lady and the Tramp," two cats (Lee provided their voices) lay out the facts of their existence: "We are Siamese if you please. We are Siamese if you don't please." A famous perfectionist when it came to her performances—she controlled the technical as well as the musical elements of her shows—Peggy Lee knew what she was about, and that purring self-containment and sureness of footing make even her earliest recordings, which are now sixty years old, sound distinctive and mature. Her voice wasn't big, but it was womanly—it had hips. She told Whitney Balliett in 1985, "People say my voice is thin or small, but I have a lot more voice than I ever use. I ration it, and it's lasting very nicely." By that time, she had become the rather grand Miss Peggy Lee, and had sheathed herself in a weird casing of extraterrestrial glamour—the platinum wig, the beaded headdress, the heavy makeup, the sunglasses—but she was still fundamentally earthy, and that rootedness enabled her to range playfully around virtually every popular-music style during her career without seeming ridiculous and without getting lost artistically.

Peggy Lee's own favorite among her recordings was one she made for Capitol in 1957—an album of ballads called "The Man I Love." Her labelmate Frank Sinatra conducted Nelson Riddle's arrangements, and part of what makes the album moving is the idea of these two not so old pros working together. She and Sinatra brought out tremendous tenderness in each other; he is at her service, plumping the pillows for her, making her comfortable, helping to create something of relaxed intimacy and shimmering beauty. Her voice is quiet and warm and sometimes quavery, with an occasional crack in it that fleetingly calls up Billie Holiday. In Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein's "The Folks Who Live on the Hill," the last song on the album, she imbues each part of the opening phrase, "Someday, we'll build a home on a hilltop high, you and I," with its fullest possible measure of hope and wistfulness. (She created a similar feeling of vulnerability in another recording of a Kern-Hammerstein number, "Don't Ever Leave Me," a couple of years later, over George Shearing's piano accompaniment; the record is essentially a three-minute, sung kiss.) Peggy Lee had a torchy, nighttime side, but she also had an aura of natural, daytime light about her. Her bent was optimistic—she wrote songs with titles like "It's a Good Day" and "I Love Being Here with You" and "There'll Be Another Spring." Listening to her, you feel the breath of life against your skin.

—*Nancy Franklin*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

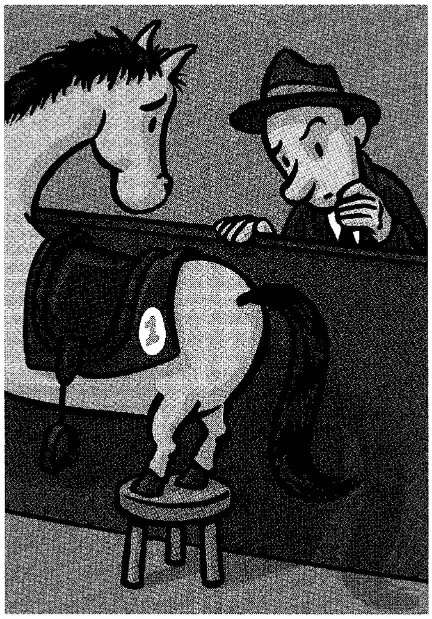
SHREDDERS THROUGH THE AGES

For a while, the Central Pacific Railroad looked like a sure thing. Started in 1861 by four Sacramento merchants known as the Big Four—one of them was Leland Stanford, the founder of Stanford University—the company owned the right to build the western end of the transcontinental railroad. The Central Pacific was blessed with immense land grants, taxpayer subsidies, and an apparent monopoly on rail traffic into California. In anticipation of big profits, outside investors, many of them British, snapped up the company's stocks and bonds. But the big profits never reached England. Instead, they found their way to the pockets of the Big Four, who had set up an outside construction firm that just happened to win the contract to build the railroad. The construction company vastly overcharged for its services, so that by the time the railroad was built the Big Four had taken in some fifty million dollars in overcharges alone. When investigators came calling, they found that the construction company's records had been—wouldn't you know it—destroyed.

The paper shredder has come a long way in the past hundred and thirty years, but little else has changed. The collapse of Enron looks a lot like a reprise of the Central Pacific swindle. In both cases, company executives took better care of themselves than of their shareholders or their creditors. Enron's top executives set up murky outside partnerships, and though these may not have been quite so egregious as the Big Four's, the result has been pretty much the same.

The Central Pacific and Enron are classic examples of what's known as the principal-agent problem—the problem being that corporations tend not to be run by the people who own them. Shareholders (the principals) can never be sure what a company's managers (their agents) are up to with their money—the managers may be paying themselves too much, lying about earnings, or channelling funds to their own outside firms. In theory, there are a few remedies for the agency problem. One is the granting of stock options, which are designed, in part, to align the interests of managers and owners. If the bosses have an ownership stake, the thinking goes, their own best interest dovetails with that of their shareholders. But it rarely works out that way. Most stock-option plans just fatten executives' wallets without protecting shareholders at all.

Another remedy is formal regulation: requiring companies to issue quarterly reports, undergo audits, disclose important news, and so forth. Obviously, companies can't disclose everything, but in the stock market the general rule has been: the more information, the better. For the most part, American corporations now have to reveal more about themselves, more often, than ever before. Yet corporate blowups and scandals have not gone away. If anything, they seem to be on the rise. Waste Management, Sunbeam, Rite Aid, Cendant, MicroStrategy, McKesson: the line is long at the Hall of Shame.



Has the system failed? Certainly, corporate accounting is in need of some serious repair, and better regulation is in order. But it's also possible that the system has worked *too* well. Amid the roar of the bull market, investors presumed that government oversight would protect them. They grew complacent, even foolhardy, forgetting that ever since human beings learned to count they have been trying to rip each other off. At Enron, there were plenty of signs of trouble, but shareholders ignored them, or failed to look for them. Between 1998 and 2000, Enron's operating margins shrank from an already small 4.4 per cent to a minuscule 1.9 per cent. Enron's return on capital—the most important measure of performance—was woeful, about what one could have made on a T-bill. The company's strategy of off-loading assets and debt onto outside partnerships set up by, and in some cases run by, its own employees was dubious. And anyone who cared could see that Enron executives were dumping stock.

Investors also knew that Enron was not giving them all the information they needed. Enron was proudly close-mouthed. Its financial statements were impenetrable. The company liked to talk about the new businesses it was expanding into, but then it didn't really say how those businesses were doing. At times, its labyrinthine financials bordered on self-parody. In the annual report Enron filed with the S.E.C. last year, it listed more than three thousand "subsidiary or limited partnership interests"—many of them chartered in the Cayman Islands. It failed to explain how it managed to keep track of them all. Obfuscation usually signals incompetence, or worse. Enron made it seem like brilliant strategy.

The people who so avidly snapped up Enron's stock—thereby making its executives rich—were not ordinary retail investors. Most of them were big institutions, led, supposedly, by wise and skeptical men and women. Yet almost none of these people saw the train coming. Why? Well, consider a phenomenon the psychologist Gerald Wilde calls "risk compensation." If a given behavior seems less risky than it did before, people compensate by doing it in a riskier fashion. If you improve road lighting or install anti-lock brakes, people drive faster and more recklessly. If you spend a lot of money on flood control, they build further out on the floodplain. In other words, just because people feel safer doesn't mean that they are. So if you devise a sophisticated system of disclosure and oversight, designed to protect investors, investors are more likely to feel comfortable taking a risk on companies like Enron. The upshot: the agents get the profits, while the principals, and the paperwork, get shredded.

—*James Surowiecki*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

PERSONAL HISTORY

MY HOLY WAR

What do a vicar's son and a suicide bomber have in common?

BY JONATHAN RABAN

When I was growing up in England, churches were still by far the tallest buildings in the landscape. With their towers and battlements, these domestic fortresses of Christendom, built as much to intimidate as to inspire, were close cousins and coevals of the Crusader castles in Turkey and the Middle East, like Birecik, Markab, and Crac des Chevaliers, whose lordly ruins I later saw, always from a distance and always with an unwelcome pang of déjà vu. My boarding school was attached to Worcester Cathedral, a magnificent crenellated pile, from the top of whose two-hundred-foot tower you could, so it was said, see clear across six counties. It was also said that a threepenny bit flipped out from the tower onto the head of an unwary passerby would cause instant death. This maneuver wasn't as easy as it may sound, and the cathedral roof below the tower was spattered with coins that had failed to reach their target, several of them mine.

The cathedral was full of emblems of Christianity's violent past. In the choir was King John's tomb, topped with a marble effigy of the King, brother of Richard the Lionheart, who taxed England dry to pay for his bloody Third Crusade against Saladin. In the south aisle, a museum case held a number of small treasures under dusty glass. I particularly relished a curled, yellowish-brown object that looked like a half-eaten cannoli shell. A faded label, inscribed in sepia ink, proclaimed it to be the skin of a flayed Dane. I never quite believed in children's hymns like "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild"; one had only to look around Christian buildings to see that this was a religion of the sword, of imperial conquest, of torture and coercion—a great, antique war machine, disguised as an engine of sweetness and light.

My father was a clergyman who came to ordination late, after a successful wartime career as an artillery officer followed by a spell as the regional secretary of a Christian voluntary organization. I was, from age twelve, a sullen atheist. Pimple-faced, voice treacherously skidding from baritone to falsetto, I tried to explain to my father that religion had always done more bad in the world than it had done good: What about the Spanish Inquisition? What about the Salem witch trials? What about the Thirty Years' War? What about the Bishops and the Bomb? It was obvious: religion was over—finished, a long disease for which the cure had been found in the form of mass education and a taste of modest material well-being. My father, in the yellowed dog collar that had seen service around my grandfather's neck and the ancient black cassock that had been passed on to him by my great-uncle Cyril, was an egregious (fast becoming my favorite word) anachronism, and might just as well have gone strolling around the village in codpiece and tights.

It was a lot easier to be a budding atheist in the mid-nineteen-fifties than it was to be a budding vicar. The churches of England, grand as they appeared from a distance, were riddled with worm and rot. Beside each church stood a giant plywood thermometer, precariously rigged with guy ropes, recording the progress of the restoration fund for the tower or the roof. The thermometers often perished in the weather before the red paint began to climb the scale. Sunday congregations were thin and growing thinner—lost to TV, the home-improvement craze, and weekend jaunts in the new family car.

After his curacy, my father's first full parish was a sprawling village, Pennington, on the outskirts of Lymington, in Hampshire. Luckily for him, the church was Victorian and not in a state of imminent physical collapse, and a fair sprinkling of parishioners still showed up at services. The local gentry came to Matins, to set an example to the vil-

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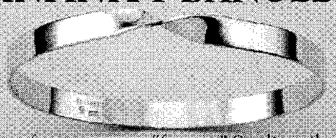

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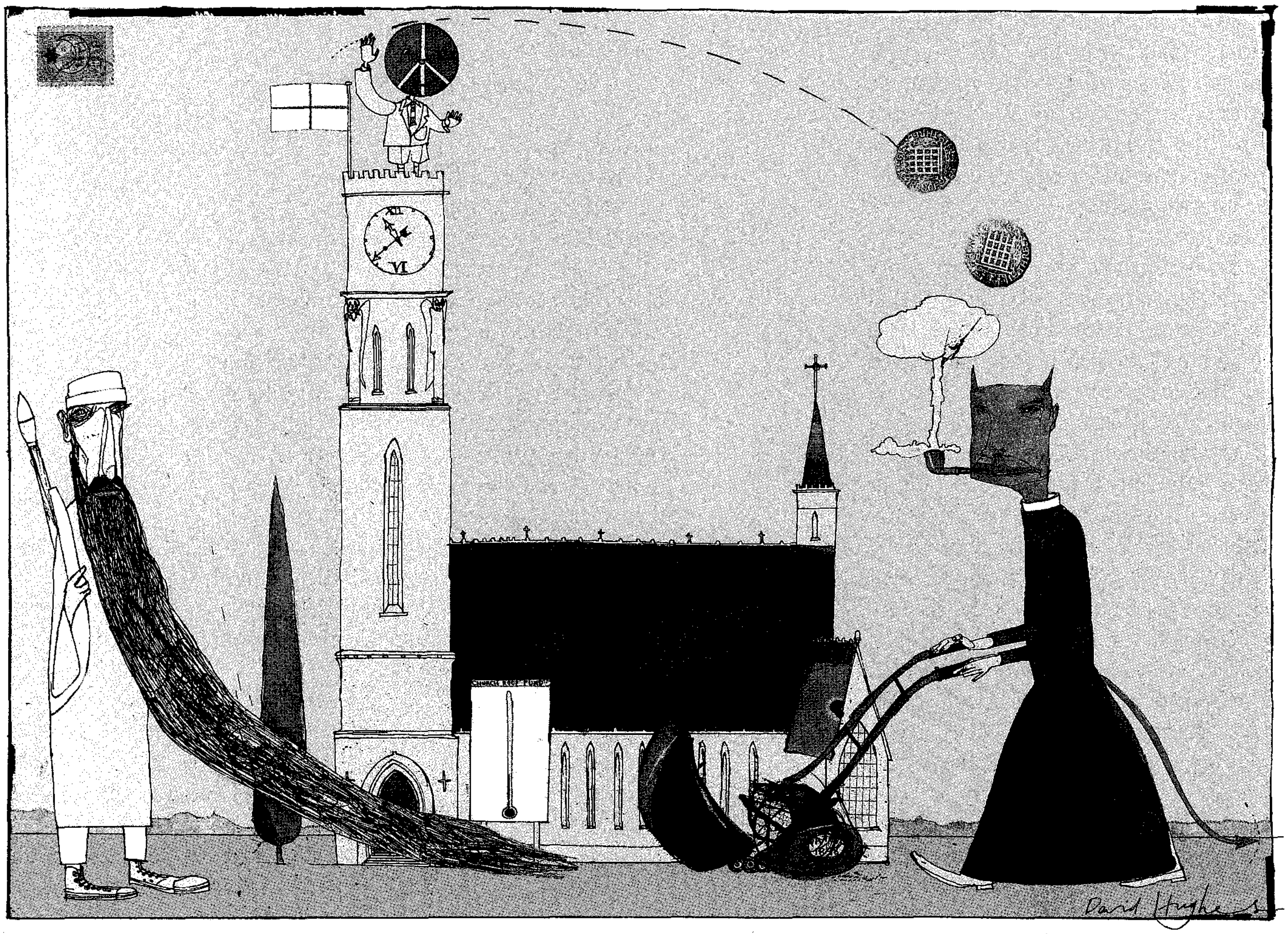


Islamism confers a heroic glamour on the alienation of the immigrant—especially the male immigrant—in a foreign culture.

DAVID HUGHES

lagers, and because the church porch was their gathering point before they climbed into their Jaguars and Rovers and swept off for pre-luncheon sherry. The farmers came. So did the retired Army types, who addressed my father as Padre, along with a dutiful remnant of shopkeepers and agricultural laborers.

Like most sixteen-year-olds, as I was then, I could see inside people's heads. None of the churchgoers actually believed. They might go through the motions, singing the hymns, crossing their hands to accept the Communion wafer, covering their eyes in the performance of public prayer, but they didn't really think that the world had been created by a Palestinian peasant, or that a personal paradise of harps and angels awaited them on the far side of their last visit to the Lymington hospital. These dark-suited hypocrites no more subscribed to my father's ritualist, Anglo-Catholic theology, with its transformational magic, than I did. I could tell, for I was an angry fundamentalist with a lock on truth, and as militant in my own way as any fanatic with a holy book. I could understand the idea of a Church Militant, but a church without passion, without conviction, without the steel of the true believer was beyond my adolescent comprehension.

It would be nearly twenty years before Philip Larkin wrote the lines that I wanted to quote to my father in 1958: "Religion . . . / That vast moth-eaten musical brocade / Created to pretend we never die." Even in rural Pennington, even on Sundays, we were on the brink of a new and saner world of secular realism. God would join the rest of our discarded toys up in the attic; the pretense of belief would be gone soon; and no one would ever again go into battle high on the hallucinogen of religious superstition. The idea that any religion would have sufficient power left in it to fuel a twenty-first-century war would have struck me as grotesque.

My father's second parish, to which he moved in the mid-nineteen-sixties, was the kind of place that bishops describe as "a challenge"—a vast, shabby council estate, Millbrook, built by the city of Southampton to house its poorest citizens. The ugly purpose-built brick church was dwarfed by twenty-five-story tower blocks with vandalized elevators and urinous concrete stairwells, into which were packed new immigrants, single mothers, recidivists temporarily at liberty from their prisons, the unlucky, the feckless, the jobless, the chronically dependent. The windy shopping plaza at the center of the estate was largely untenanted. For some twenty thousand people, there was a ladies' hairdresser, a liquor store, and a grocery smaller than the average American 7-Eleven.

The experience of ministering to this impossible parish radicalized my father. A lifelong reflex Conservative voter, he joined the Labour Party. His High Church theology became ever more attenuated and symbolic. He climbed his way through the tower blocks less as a priest than as a psychiatric social worker. He grew a beard that made him look like Karl Marx, left his dog collar in the drawer, and went about in an open-necked plaid flannel shirt. Although his church congregations were now tiny, he worked around the clock, negotiating with the authorities on behalf of his parishioners, succoring the needy, counselling the desperate, befriending the friendless.

In Millbrook, the Anglicans, the Catholics, and the Methodists were all in the same boat—down to the same dwindling, elderly band of congregants. My father's vicarage became an ecumenical center for the local clergy, fellow-pilgrims in the stony landscape of twentieth-century unbelief. My mother served tea to the Methodists while my father shared his Haig whiskey with the Irish Catholic priest. Left out of these cheerful conferences were the proprietors of what my father called "tin tabernacles"—sectarians of unorthodox hue, like Spiritualists, Seventh-Day Adventists, charismatics, Pentecostals. I was now teaching the literature of the American Puritans, at a Welsh university college, and was getting professionally involved with serious theocrats, like Cotton and Increase Mather, whose take-no-prisoners style of religious practice struck a strangely warming chord in my atheistic, Marxist heart.

The despised tin tabernacles didn't appear to find Millbrook stony ground at all. There was always a good crowd on the balding grass outside the Pentecostal chapel on Sunday mornings, and many of the people there looked disconcertingly young. I had been taught to think of the wilder reaches of English nonconformity as marginal and eccentric, if not certifiably insane, and wrote off the Pentecostals as an irrelevant blip on the smooth graph of rising skepticism and declining superstition. The coming age of reason wouldn't be forestalled by ninety or so suburban enthusiasts, in puffy nylon golf jackets and raspberry-pink twinsets, talking in tongues. But I should have paid more attention. Millbrook was an issue, and so were tin tabernacles—small, disestablished powerhouses of vehemence and zeal. I made no connection then between the modern English illuminists and their American cousins and ancestors. Had I actually visited a tin tabernacle, I might have heard an echo of Jonathan Edwards preaching on "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," and realized that something was up—a new era of religious ferocity.

THE EMPTY SPACE

A square space on the wall
marks the memory of that picture
painted at night, stolen at night,
worked on at night, in Rome, from the
artist's window.
How I remember Castel Sant' Angelo
in her night picture, gleaming with
history-in-darkness, guardian of old Rome,
and the artist's home was full of midnight
and the light of all Europe shone in her hands.
She painted till dawn, having thought
to herself one night, I will paint
that scene, and started
and patiently full-heartedly pursued it
and did it completely—large, dark and light.
My honest close companion on the wall:
It is all over now. The thieves came by night.

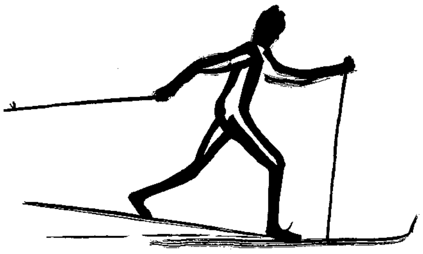
—*Muriel Spark*

The leading players in the September 11th attacks found their vocations as fanatical holy warriors not in the God-fearing Middle East but in the most profane quarters of big cities in the West. Back home in Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, their fathers, brothers, uncles have formed an incredulous chorus. "He was a donkey when it came to politics." "He was a normal person. . . . He drank alcohol, he had girlfriends." "His personality and his life bore no relation to the kind of things that happened." "We are in shock. . . . We thought he liked the U.S.A." In Europe and the United States, each of these ordinary, insecure, unprepossessing men learned to think of himself as someone who might yet have a spectacular career, as a martyr. This peculiar strain of religious belief, with its equal measures of rage and passion for death, was hatched in Egypt more than fifty years ago, and seems to have found an ideal growing climate in exile, in the most secular-looking landscape yet devised: the low-rent, rootless, multilingual suburbs.

The essential charter of the jihad movement—its "Mein Kampf"—is Sayyid Qutb's "Milestones" (1964). Before Qutb toured the United States, between 1948 and 1950, he was best known as an Egyptian novelist, poet, and critic. After his time here, he became famous as an Islamic ideologue and a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Cairo-based think tank and home of theocratic revolution. He achieved martyrdom in 1966, when he was executed by Gamal Abdel Nasser. His book lives on. It can be found, in whole or in part, on many of the Internet sites created by Muslim students.

The heart of Qutb's argument rests on a rhetorical flourish: the modern world exactly reflects the state of things at the beginning of the seventh century, before the Koran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. The richest parts of Arabia were then occupied by foreign imperialists—Romans and Persians. Drinking, fornication, shopping, and vulgar entertainment were the chief pursuits of a morally bankrupt society sunk in *jahiliyyah*, the condition of ignorance, barbarism, and chaos from which the Arabs were providentially rescued by the gift of the Koran. They toppled their foreign oppressors and established the *khilafah*, or caliphate; that is, the nation (*ummah*) of Islam, which existed, though in steadily deteriorating form, until 1924, when the last caliph was deposed. The Sykes-Picot Agreement, of 1916, in which the British and the French carved up Arabia into colonial spheres of influence, lent symmetry to the argument: history was on rewind, with the Romans and Persians walking backward onto the screen. The twentieth century was a new *jahiliyyah*, and the great project of the Islamic revival was the restoration of the rule of Allah by force of arms. The coming jihad must be global in scale. Qutb wrote, "This religion is really a universal declaration of the freedom of man from servitude to other men and from servitude to his own desires. It is a declaration that sovereignty belongs to God alone and that He is the Lord of all the worlds."

Qutb didn't join the Muslim Brotherhood until 1952—three years after the assassination of the movement's founder, Hassan al-Banna, and two years after Qutb's spell of expatriation in the United States. Firsthand experience of Western *jahiliyyah* seems to have transformed Qutb from a devout but orthodox believer into the architect of worldwide jihad. His American writing (fragments of it were translated and published by John Calvert last year in the journal *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*) shows him as a lonely naïf, adrift in a world of lewd temptations. Although Qutb was forty-two when he sailed from Alexandria for New York in 1948 (the Farouk regime was paying him to study American education methods), his voice sounds painfully young. On the voyage out, a "drunken, semi-naked" woman showed up at the door to his cabin, an American government agent, dispatched by Langley expressly to corrupt him—or so he told his Egyptian biographer years later. Qutb's sense of extreme moral precariousness comes to the fore in every encounter. Few men past the age of forty can ever have felt their immortal souls to be in such danger at a church hop as Qutb did when he attended one in Greeley, Colorado. The pastor, doubling as disk jockey, lowered the lights to impart "a romantic, dreamy effect," and put on a record of "Baby, It's Cold Outside" (presumably the Esther Williams and Ricardo Montalban version, from the soundtrack of the 1949 hit movie "Neptune's Daughter"). "The dancing intensified. . . . The hall swarmed with legs. . . . Arms circled arms, lips met lips, chests met chests, and the atmosphere was full of love." We're in the psychodrama of temptation here—the language tumescent with arousal, even as it affects a tone of detachment and disdain.



In his Koranic commentary, "In the Shade of the Qur'an," Qutb suggested that the believer's brief sojourn on earth should be spent "purifying the filthy marsh of this world." Rich, sexy, Truman-era America gave him a taste of this world at its filthiest and marshiest. His American letters show him wading fastidiously, a lone pilgrim, through "the life of *jahiliyyah*, hollow and full of contradictions, defects and evils." American jazz, football, wrestling, movies (though he confessed to enjoying "Gone with the Wind" and "Wuthering Heights"), the talk of cars and money supplied Qutb with ammunition for his great theological assault on "this rubbish heap of the West"; and so did the dedication of his Greeley neighbors to weekend lawn maintenance. America, with its natural disposition to clamor and excess, has always been a happy hunting ground for puritans of every denomination; Qutb scored a notable first when he hit on lawn mowing as a target for a spiritual critique of the West. But sex, not lawns—shameless, American, *jahili* sex—was clearly uppermost on the mind of this lifelong bachelor. The word "desire" ripples through "Milestones," and always, it seems, meaning the same thing—the drunken temptress on the ship, a tattooed boy in a Washington, D.C., coffee shop, the terrible peril of the church hop.

The Muslim Brotherhood's Hassan al-Banna, who attempted to liberate Egypt from its corrupt "apostate" monarchy, had told his followers to "prepare for jihad and be lovers of death." It is easy to see death's erotic allure for a man of Qutb's temperament, raised on the Koran's worldly and sensual depiction of the hereafter. The Gardens of Bliss resemble nothing so much as the great

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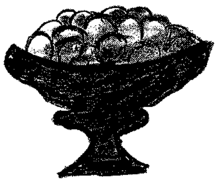
Playboy Mansion in the sky, watered by underground springs (all sorts of delightful wetness abound in Paradise), and furnished with cushions and carpets designed for life on the horizontal. Male entrants are greeted by "companions"—"maidens, chaste, restraining their glances, whom no man or jinn before them has touched." Qutb insisted that the descriptions of Heaven in the Koran were symbolic, not literal. The pomegranates wouldn't really be pomegranates, nor the maidens really maidens. These "luxuries . . . similar to luxuries enjoyed in this life" were there to "help us to imagine the ultimate of sweetness and joy." Yet the Koranic Paradise remains obdurately earthbound, full of nubile girls unzipping plantains. It reads like the dream of a repressed and awkward man who might be a young soldier on a foreign posting, or Sayyid Qutb in Greeley, Colorado, or Mohamed Atta in Harburg, Germany.

Like many homesick people, living outside their language in an abrasive foreign culture, Qutb aggrandized his loneliness into heroic solitude. Walking the streets of Greeley, he was the secret, lone agent of God's will. In "Milestones," there's a passage that is unmistakably a portrait of Qutb in America: "The Believer from his height looks down at the people drowning in dirt and mud. He may be the only one; yet he is not dejected or grieved, nor does his heart desire that he take off his neat and immaculate garments and join the crowd." Being able to look down on people drowning in dirt and mud makes you feel taller, the better to "enjoy" your faith as you survey the obscene couplings of the little folk who roll in the ordure below.

This is exactly the posture that hard-line Islamists who live in the West today are advised to adopt. Web sites and magazines of the radical Muslim diaspora are preoccupied to the point of obsession with the issue of "living with *Kufr*." *Kufr*—a simpler notion than *jahiliyyah*—is disbelief; *kuffar* are unbelievers or infidels. "It is a fact of life that we must, to some extent, keep close company with the *kuffar*. This is almost unavoidable given that we work, study, and unfortunately play with them," Amir Abdullah wrote in an article entitled "Preserving the Islamic Identity in the West: Threats and Solutions," published in the magazine *Nida'ul Islam*, in the spring of 1997. "The likeness of Islam and *kuffar* is like that of fresh clear spring water and water brought up from the bottom of a suburban sewer. If even a drop of the filthy water enters the clear water, the clarity diminishes. Likewise it takes only a drop of the filth of disbelief to contaminate Islam in the West."

Kufr leaks through the TV set into Muslim homes, bringing "moral bankruptcy" to the living room, turning children against parents, wives against husbands: "The news provides us with an insight into the world around us. A world where mujahideen are called 'terrorists,' where the Straight Path is called 'Islamic Fundamentalism,' and where all Muslims are misogynistic wife-bashers." The *kuffar* lie in wait for tender innocents: "Muslim families, having lost much of their Islamic values, have sold out to the West. By sending our children to kindergarten and child care centers, we are sending our children to be suckled by the Shaytan." Or, as the title of an article on One Ummah (a mainstream Muslim Web site, and no great friend to radical Islamism) puts it, "Do You Know What Shaytan Is Feeding Your Baby?"

Nida'ul Islam, which I take to be the *New Left Review* of the Islamist revolution, is published in Lakemba, a nondescript low-rise suburb nine miles southwest of downtown Sydney, and aims to reflect "the Jihad stream amongst the Islamic movements." Long, admiring interviews with Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman and Osama bin Laden run alongside political analyses of "apostate" regimes in Muslim countries (the Sauds, Mubarak, Qaddafi, Hussein, Musharraf), extracts from "Milestones," and advice columns on topics like adjusting to college, shaving the beard, what to do about Christmas, and choosing a wife. The magazine consistently represents the life of the Muslim in the West as a hazardous survival exercise in enemy-occupied territory. *Kufr* is an oppression as real as any Middle Eastern tyranny. In some ways, it's even more dangerous to live among the *kuffar* than in, say, Fahd's Arabia or Mubarak's Egypt, because the forces of *kufr* are more insidious and omnipresent. The Shaytan stalks the suburbs, trying to catch believers off guard. A Christmas card arrives in the mail. Someone from the office invites you to have a drink with him after work. Your daughter begs to be allowed to go to the prom. You find your own eyes straying to the window of the adult-lingerie store. You had better remember your Sayyid Qutb:



> There is only one place on earth which can be called the house of Islam, and it is that place where an Islamic state is established and the Shari'ah is the authority and God's laws are observed. . . . The rest of the world is the house of war.

Collaboration with the enemy will result in punishment in the hereafter. If, for instance, you cast your vote in a *kufr* election, you commit the mortal sin of *shirk*—which is to associate other gods or rulers with Allah. Last June, when the rest of the British press were busy endorsing Tony Blair or William Hague, the monthly *Khilafah Magazine* published a special election issue in which it endorsed God. As Qutb said, "A Muslim has no nationality except his belief."

What is loosely called the Muslim world has given its inhabitants ample experience of oppression; of constant surveillance by the secret police and their informers; of jail, torture, summary execution performed as a fête champêtre in the market square. (In 1978, I saw—or, rather, heard—two men shot like this in front of a large and eager crowd in Sanaa, Yemen; Polaroid pictures of their exploding heads were hawked, minutes later, as valuable souvenirs.) Many of the key texts of Islamic revolution were written in exile, in hiding, or in a prison cell. A consciousness forged in conditions of tyranny is often liable to find tyranny wherever in the world it settles—in Haldon Street, Lakemba, or in Gloucester Road, London S.W.7. Islamism—which by no means signifies Islam at large—needs oppression. A powerful sense of *kufr* helps the believer to live in Western exile in the necessary state of chronic persecution, from which his theology was born, and on which its survival depends.

It also confers a heroic glamour on the everyday alienation felt by the immigrant—especially the male immigrant—who struggles to keep his head up in a foreign culture. The American who condescends to you because she doesn't understand your funny accent is not simply being bad-mannered; she's evil—an agent of the Shaytan. Your corrosive solitude is the measure of your invincible superiority to the *kuffar*, in their hell-bound ignorance and corruption. You are not as they are. You make a point of not shaking hands with the female examiner of your thesis. When the next-door neighbors toss a ball that happens to roll across your path, you walk on without looking up. At Shuckum's Raw Bar and Grill, you loudly put down the barmaid in a row over the forty-eight-dollar tab. At Huffman Aviation, you grab the seat cushion belonging to another student, and refuse to give it back. These are not displays of sullen adolescent aggression; they're moral gestures, designed to put the *kuffar* in their rightful place. It's what certain angry, frustrated young men have always secretly dreamed of—a theology of rebellion, rooted in hostility and contempt.

Since the deposition of the last caliph, in 1924, Islam has had no one to speak with authority on its behalf. It relies instead on a quarrelsome army of jurists and scholars, each of whom interprets the Koran, the Sunna (stories of the Prophet's exemplary life), and the Hadith (the Prophet's sayings) according to his own lights, which leads to a marvellous profusion of schisms, sects, and heresies. We've had a taste of this in recent months, as various scholars (a generously inclusive term) have construed the meaning of the word "jihad" for a Western audience.

There is greater jihad (Jihad al-Akbar) and lesser jihad (Jihad al-Asghar), and total impassioned disagreement as to which is which. Is greater jihad an internal struggle against one's own desires? Or is it war, on a literal battlefield, against the *kuffar*? For every moderate imam who categorically states that it is the first, there's a radical Islamist who argues, with equal plausibility, that it's

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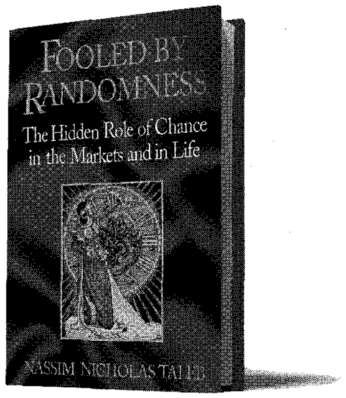

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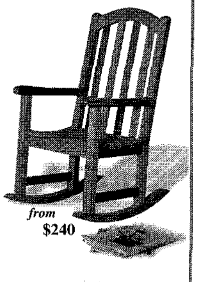

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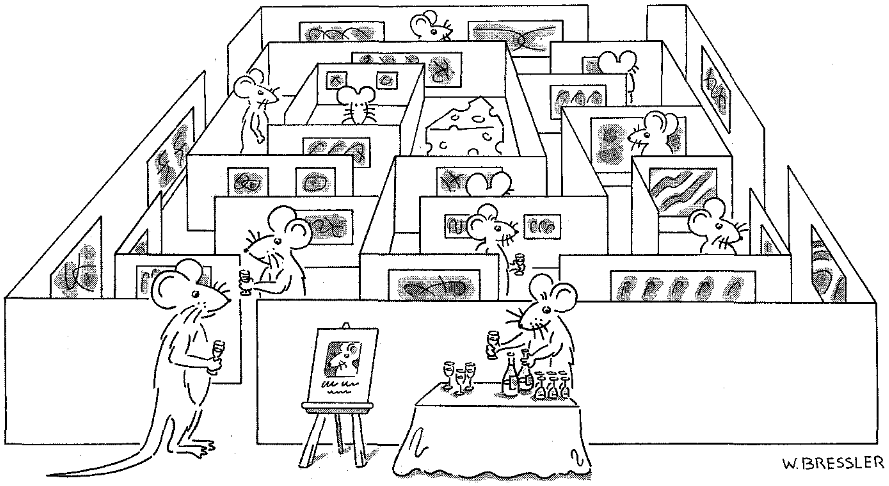

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the second. The best you can discover about the "true" meaning of "jihad" is that you were a fool to ask the question in the first place.

We know to our cost what the word means to "the jihad stream," though we seem to be hopelessly ignorant of the width and depth of that sectarian branch of the Islamic river. American Muslims of the kind who agree to be interviewed by reporters invariably say that it's a piddling and heretical rivulet, while Osama bin Laden and his claque boast that it's more on the scale of the Amazon or the Nile. It has found its way into virtually every major Western city. It is taught by charismatic mullahs in hundreds of suburban Islamic tin tabernacles, like Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman's community mosque in Jersey City and Abu Hamza al-Mazri's mosque in Finsbury Park, London. Several of the suspects in the September 11th attacks were said to have plugged into it on the Internet from their lodgings in Florida and San Diego. Marwan al-Shehhi and Mohamed Atta found it in a tiny improvised mosque in Harburg, across from Hamburg on the wrong side of the Elbe.

One thing I have in common with Mohamed Atta is a long-standing affection for the Aleppo souk, about which he wrote his thesis at Hamburg-Harburg Technical University. I spent seventeen days in Aleppo in the nineteen-seventies, with no other commission than to lose myself in that maze of ripe-smelling underground streets and limestone tunnels, each one dedicated to a single commodity—gold, hides, soap, transistor radios, rugs, spices, plastic toys, ouds (the Arabic ancestors of the lute), canned vegetables, silks, rope, copperware, shoes. Walk far enough in the Aleppo souk, navigating with your nose, and you'd eventually find any object you could name. I checked with Google to see just how long the souk actually is, if all its streets were laid end to end, and found it to be, variously, seven, eight, ten, twelve, thirteen, sixteen, and "about 30" kilometres. That haziness corresponds exactly with my memory of the place, which is geometrically contained and yet has a labyrinthine infinitude. It can be walked through in a few minutes, or it can go on forever. Lit with strings of flyspecked low-wattage bulbs, it is—or was—an Arabia in miniature; a lovely, complex urban organism that had, when I was there, in 1978, collapsed gracefully into the fifteenth century. Tourism in Syria then amounted to little more than the occasional coachload of Soviet factory workers, though Aleppo outside the souk was becoming an untidy mess of concrete and cinder block, its narrow streets choked with drivers who kept their thumbs permanently on their horns.

Twenty years later, Mohamed Atta saw the souk as being under siege by tourists and their architecture of fast-food restaurants and multistory hotels. One glance at a picture of the two-hundred-and-fifty-room Chahba Cham Palace, a memorably ugly brute that now towers over Aleppo, is enough to make me warm to Atta's thesis that the souk is dying, fatally polluted by the Western-style developments that surround it.

In Harburg, as Atta meditated on the poisoning of Aleppo, he found his way to the Al-Tauhid mosque, where the anti-American Islamist theology of the imam made a snug fit with Atta's academic pursuits. The particular object of Atta's abomination was the American skyscraper—the global symbol of the insolent power of the *kuffar*. His thesis topic couldn't have been better chosen to illustrate the dark preoccupations of the jihad stream: in the Aleppo souk, Atta had found an age-old, smelly world of half-lit arched passages, violated by shameless and greedy *kufr* intruders—an image that might spring straight from the pages of Sayyid Qutb, where sex and jihad are intimately entwined.

Atta's architectural ideas, his displacement in the wilderness of outer Hamburg, and his growing fury at the apostate regime in his native Egypt, combined with an acute sexual squeamishness, all coalesced with the paranoid Koranic scholarship of the Al-Tauhid mosque, and he resolved to contribute his life to the cause of Allah. It's the business of religion to put two and two together and make five. The dialectic of purity and pollution led him to the "noble obligation" of martyrdom. He let his beard grow. He took to scraping the frosting off cakes, lest it contain lard. His manner changed from smiling and polite to the frigid altitude of the believer, stepping fastidiously through the filth of *kufr*. He went missing for the duration of 1998, a period most likely spent in an Al Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan.

Ministering to the alienated and the displaced, my father wore his beliefs thin to the point of transparency. The idea that alienation and displacement might themselves constitute the basis of a religious awakening would have been repellent to him. Broad Church Anglicanism was about reaching out to the margins to reclaim people for the center: born in political compromise, the Church of England had little appetite for protest and none for rage.

"Woe to the bloody city of Lichfield!" George Fox, the first Quaker, shouted as he walked barefoot through the town in 1651. You'd never catch a member of the

Anglican clergy doing that. Fox wrote proudly of the "mighty dread" that his preaching inspired, and of the fear of the citizens when they learned that "the man in leathern britches has come." Like his hat, which remained defiantly stuck to his head when he was indoors, the leather gear was an outward sign of Fox's spiritual estrangement from the depraved world of seventeenth-century England. Fox and his original Quakers (the "new fanatic sect, of dangerous principles," as John Evelyn described them in his diary in 1656) might have created a real stir in Millbrook; but my father, going about the parish in plain clothes, with his increasingly plain-clothes theology, had little to offer to the angry, the excluded, the exploited, the male young.

As I see now, my own atheism—my ultimate weapon in the Oedipal war—was really a dissident religious creed, full of furious conviction and an inchoate, adolescent hunger for the battlefield. It went hand in hand with membership in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. The first time I entered my father's Pennington vicarage wearing the three-legged runic peace symbol on my lapel, it met with an immensely satisfactory response: "I will not have your wearing that badge in this house." From then on, I was a nuclear fundamentalist.

I waylaid girls and frightened them with the deadly poetry of kilotons, neutrons, gamma rays, fallout, and radiation sickness. At one mile . . . at two . . . at five. As my father had the Gospels, so I had the bomb. I used it daily, to make mushroom clouds all over Hampshire, and to gain converts to my brand of millennialism. The box of badges that I kept in my bedroom rapidly emptied. I secretly indoctrinated my younger brothers, aged nine and ten, telling them that God was finished, and that we were at world's end, unless I and my kind won out against the deaf, blind, stupid old men of the establishment, like the Vicar of Pennington, who were leading us down the path to certain annihilation.

C.N.D. was then led by John Collins, the "Red Canon," a renegade Anglican priest of whom my father richly disapproved, and the ancient, spry, pixieish Bertrand Russell, atheism's own philosopher-king. The organization must have been embarrassed by its militant-extremist faction—the young men of warrior age for whom the peace symbol was a regimental badge and C.N.D. their rampaging army.

Each Easter, we marched—out of step and out of uniform, but marched—in loose platoons, under rippling banners, from Aldermaston, site of the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, to Trafalgar Square, sleeping rough and living off the land like guerrillas. For mile after rainy mile, we sang "The Red Flag":

The people's flag is deepest red
It shrouded oft our martyred dead;
And ere their limbs grew stiff and cold
Their hearts' blood dyed its every fold.

I can still feel the intense warming glow of unearned righteousness that accompanied the singing of these words. Midway between Bracknell and Windsor, standing shoulder to shoulder with the world's oppressed, voicing our hatred of the belligerent power of the United States and its puppet nations in the NATO alliance, we were bathed in personal glory:

Then raise the scarlet standard high!
Beneath its shade we'll live and die.
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer
We'll keep the red flag flying high!

Back at the vicarage, my father blew a gust of St. Bruno pipe smoke over the remains of breakfast, and said, "So you think Mr. Macmillan needs to take moral guidance from a bunch of spotty teenagers, do you?" Nothing like a traitor's sneer to harden belief into the steel of true zealotry: I finished him off with a single round from my thought-murder gun.

Lately, I've been keeping that angry boy on hand, to read the literature of jihad on my behalf. As skeptical as I am, he nevertheless reports with a scowl that he can connect with it pretty well. And, perhaps, he should. He was an unwitting participant in the fervor. It was his father who was the less deceived. The Vicar of Pennington, later Rural Dean of Southampton, went to his grave a rationalist, a stoic, a rueful humanist in a world ablaze with passionate supernatural convictions.

The running cliché about the Afghan war is that it is a conflict between a "modern" and a "medieval" world view. The reassuring implication

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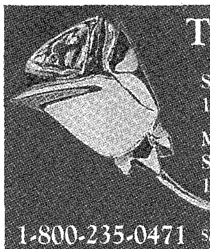

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is that its outcome is a foregone conclusion. Although Mullah Omar and his immediate colleagues did look as if they'd escaped from the cast of a production of "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" (their retro fashion itself a telegenic political statement), the wider jihad movement is not a benighted relic of the Middle Ages but a modern construct, built and operated by thoroughly modern young men.

The first reported British casualties in this war were amateur soldiers from Luton, Crawley, Leicester, and London who had enlisted with the Taliban and were promptly claimed as martyrs by the Tottenham-based Islamist organization Al-Muhajiroun (the Emigrants). The suburban mujahideen were second-generation Englishmen, several of them university educated, who sacrificed the prospect of well-paid secular careers for their shot at paradise. In Lahore, Abdul Momin, a twenty-five-year-old civil engineer from east London, bound for Kabul, told a reporter from the *Observer*, "I did not like London because it is spiritually rotten. I want to live a proper Muslim life." In Luton, a young Muslim told the *Guardian*, "Lots of us believe that it is right to fight against the Americans and the British, even if we have grown up in Britain."

Trooping off to find their corner of a foreign field, in much the same spirit as an earlier generation went to Spain with the International Brigade, the volunteers were Web designers, engineers, students, delivery drivers. They came across as cool, wired types, as comfortable in their modernity as any of their fellow-surfers in the Internet cafés. So did Mohamed Atta, Hani Hanjour, Ziad Jarrah, and the other hijack suspects, who left a forensic spoor of brand names across the length and breadth of the United States. We know them best as efficient modern consumers—of Parrot-Ice, Tommy Hilfiger, Econo Lodge, AAA discounts, Starbucks, Cyber Zone, Golden Tee '97 golf at Shuckum's Raw Bar and Grill, Salem cigarettes, Heineken and Budweiser, Chinese takeout from Wo Hop III, lap-dancing at Nardone's Sports Go-Go Bar and the Olympic Garden Topless Cabaret.

There's nothing unmodern about a world view that recoils from the spiritual emptiness of the urban-industrial West. Sayyid Qutb began "Milestones" with the observation that Marxism and capitalism were in a state of terminal moral exhaustion:

> The leadership of mankind by Western man is now on the decline, not because Western culture has become poor materially or because its economic and military power has become weak. The period of the Western system has come to an end primarily because it is deprived of those life-giving values which enabled it to be the leader of mankind. . . . At this crucial and bewildering juncture, the turn of Islam and the Muslim community has arrived.

Spengler and Toynbee stand conveniently at Qutb's elbow, to aid and abet the coming revolution. The bankrupt West has failed mankind. The present cycle is coming to its inevitable end. Now it's Islam's "turn."

If "Milestones" exhibits an intense, prurient disgust at the fallen morals of the modern city, berates the present with allusions to the splendors of the ancient past, prophesies the end of Western civilization, and holds up religion as the purifying force in a contaminated world, it's in distinguished company, for these are also the essential themes of "The Waste Land," the archtext of literary modernism. At least one radical Islamist is on record as having been a T. S. Eliot fan—Fathi Shiqaqi, the leader of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, who was assassinated in 1995—and it's not hard to see how Eliot's characteristic preoccupations could chime with those of the decline-of-the-West jihadis. It would appall Eliot, the Anglo-Catholic churchwarden, to hear it, but his vision of a society collapsing into spiritual ruin is very close to what Qutb tries to conjure in his depiction of *jahiliyyah*. The moral indictment of the West, central to the Islamist case, has impeccable Western credentials.

Far from being antiquated or alien, most of the intellectual baggage of the jihad movement, like the life style of its guerrillas, is disconcertingly familiar. It's like seeing a stranger sitting at the wheel of what you always thought was your car. A photograph of one of the British volunteers for service with the Taliban showed him in a T-shirt blazoned with the slogan "The Final Revelation, the Final Message, the Final System, the Final Conquest: Islam"—a message as modern in its way as the medium that carried it.

Recently, much solemn incredulity has been expended on the case of John Walker, the "American Talib." Closely echoing the male relatives of the hijack suspects, Walker's father, a lawyer, said, "I can't connect the dots between where John was and where John is." Yet, given the twin American traditions of experimental religiosity and tireless self-reinvention, the dots don't seem all that far apart. On one level, at least, Walker appears to have led an almost mythical American life in its seemingly frictionless transformations: earning his high-school diploma at sixteen, converting to Islam (via hip-hop and the Internet) after reading "The Autobiography of Malcolm X," becoming a fluent Arabist in Yemen, then a devout jihadi at a Pakistani madrasah—before he then became a guerrilla in Kashmir and Afghanistan. His evolving identity required a succession of new names—Suleyman al-Lindh, Suleyman al-Faris, Abdul Hamid. With family money, an appetite for travel, a pious idealism, a quickness of mind, and extraordinary cultural adaptability, this son of Marin County is a dark and extreme version of a classic American type, of the kind who might have been found on the road to Marrakech or Ladakh, or hanging out with Peruvian revolutionaries—and never more so than when, interviewed on his stretcher by CNN, he was found to speak English with a distinct Arabic accent. "My heart became attached to them," he said of the Taliban, as if translating from a finer, more eloquent language than the one to which he was born. Seeing Walker, and his commonsensical Catholic father, I was sent into a spin of uncomfortable recollection.

As well as prosecuting Walker for conspiring to kill Americans, the United States authorities might also usefully install him in a university somewhere and turn him into a research project. Psychologists, theologians, political scientists, and cultural historians could then sit at his feet and draw him out on the subject of why the call to jihad answers so resonantly the yearnings of clever, unhappy, well-heeled young men, from Mill Valley and Luton as well as from Cairo and Jidda. What he says might be merely as alarming as anything to be found in the caves of Tora Bora, and a lot more difficult to defeat. ♦

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BY BRUCE McCALL

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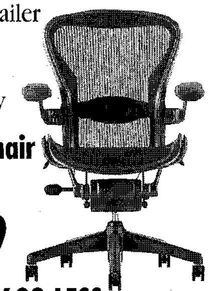

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NEW YORK JOURNAL

UNDERFOOT

When buildings go up, the city's distant past has a way of resurfacing.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

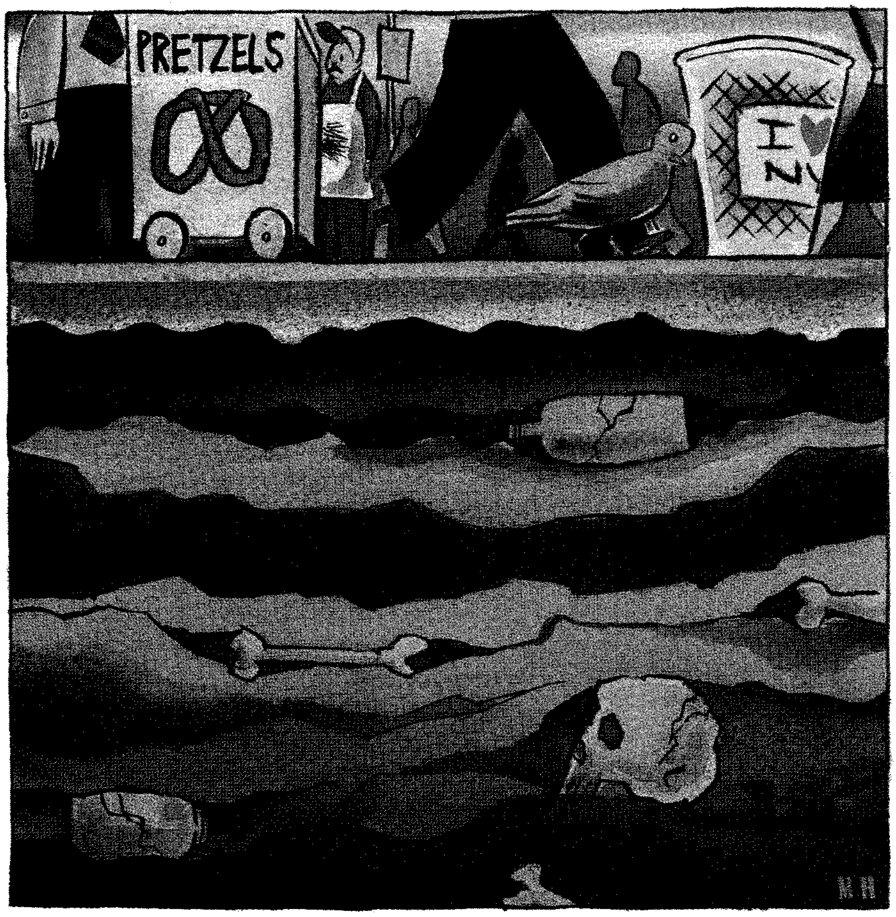
The oldest known artifact of European settlement in New York is a coin. It was issued in 1590 by Prince Maurice of Orange, to commemorate his election as a stadtholder of the City of Utrecht; it may have once belonged to a businessman named Augustine Heermans, who in the sixteen-forties had a warehouse on what is now Broad Street; and it was found in 1983 by an archeologist named Joel Grossman while he was digging in the briefly empty lot where Heermans had his warehouse and where the immense Broad Financial Center now stands. (In fact, Heermans came to Manhattan only in 1643, so either the 1590 coin was a kind of Franklin Mint collectible that he carried around with him or he was the kind of Middle European businessman who, having got his hands on a fifty-cent piece, doesn't let it go.) The First Coin was found in the remains of Heermans' warehouse, alongside a pencil and the remnants of some tobacco pipes, forming the earliest known instance of the essential lower-Manhattan trio of money, tools for symbolic analysis, and soft drugs.

"New York is a city of money, but it's probably the only major capital that doesn't run its past as a business," the archeologist Diana Wall was saying the other day, standing on Broad Street just across from the site where the First Coin was found. "Paris, London, and, obviously, Rome, but even Philadelphia and Boston—all of them have economies that depend a good deal on the past and on making the past visible, and they can therefore place a value on the past. New York doesn't, or hasn't until recently. It's a city built on money. It's always been a financial center, and, though it has a long past, it's not an easy one to retrieve." She was in the middle of an impromptu walking tour of lower Manhattan, which she had undertaken, along with her colleague the anthropologist Anne-Marie Cantwell, in order to show off some pet sites—places where, in the brief interval between one big building coming down and another big building going up, archeologists have rummaged around in the dirt to see if they could salvage something from the past.

Wall and Cantwell are both in their fifties, they are both professors—Wall at City College and Cantwell at Rutgers—and they are both archeologists of the dig-and-look-and-wonder school, rather than the theorize-and-debunk-without-looking school. They love an empirical instance that runs into an anecdote. They are undefeated by the difficulties of their occupation, which can include muggers, gawkers, mild sexual harassers, and developers. They walk around, these days in particular, with a unique, seismographic sense that the streets of New York beneath their sensible shoes are not much more than a layer of asphalt, covering a permanent sediment made of dinner china and pipes and bones and prostitutes' bedpans. New York has always been a commercial city, a city of coins and cups, and usually the sites that Cantwell and Wall look at and dig up and write about were once taverns and warehouses and brothels. (Cantwell specializes in pre-European archeology, but she'll lend a spade to any interesting dig.) It amuses them that they dig up old coins and pipes and pencils from holes in the ground, only to have those holes filled by buildings that put more coins and pipes and pencils in towers high in the air. It enforces their sense of the continuities of commercial civilization. The two have been central to the archeological renaissance that has overtaken lower Manhattan in the last twenty-five years, and they have written a terrific book about their work, called "Unearthing Gotham."

"This is where we really began," Wall went on. She had moved about a block east, to where the headquarters of Goldman, Sachs now stands, at 85 Broad Street—one of those bland, squintwindowed, stone-fronted thirty-story monstrosities that feel more like a very large fort than like a small skyscraper. In the pavement in front of the building, under glass, one can just see the foundation walls of a seventeenth-century tavern.

"This is the Stadt Huys block, as it was called, and we started digging it in 1979," she said. "The Dollar Savings Bank had bought this land at the corner of Pearl and Broad, and wanted to put up a tower. The Landmarks Preservation Commission had asked the previous owner to reconstruct the façade of a Federal-style building that had been there earlier, but somehow, in the intervening years, the façade was lost. So the new owners were talked into making another kind of gesture, which was to let us do a real archeological investigation on the site." The National Historic Preservation Act had come in by then, and the dig became a way of testing to see if you could actually find archeological material under the city. There was pretty good reason to believe that there could be New Amsterdam artifacts at that site, and they went searching for it with, as Wall put it, "the developer looking impatiently over our shoulder." It was the first large-scale archeological project in the city's history. They had been given three months to dig, and, unfortunately, just in the last week—in an illustration of the archeologist's rule that you always find the good stuff at the end—they started turning up wineglasses and wine bottles and broken tobacco pipes, and realized that they had scored big and found the remains of the King's House tavern.



Archeology here is like archeology in Sumeria, only faster, with more people watching.

MARCELLUS HALL

Archeology in lower Manhattan these days is generally carried out in the same spirit as a child's birthday party at a hired catering hall on the Upper East Side: it is compulsory, it is expensive, it is likely to end in tears, it is filled with bits of broken teacups, and the people who are paying for it are mostly anxious for it to be over. When a developer wants to put up a big building in lower Manhattan, he often has to get a zoning variance, since the building he wants to build may be too high or too bulky or too ugly for the site he wants to build it on. Ever since the Stadt Huys dig, one way for a developer to talk the city into giving him the variance has been to pay for an archeologist to dig up the site first. By doing this, he also propitiates various other gods in the alphabet jungle of applicable laws, particularly CEQR, or City Environmental Quality Review. (At times, a meta-level of appeasement can be added. One naughty developer who began construction without letting the archeologists in first was forced to install a museum in the basement of his building in order to show some of the things that archeologists had found at the building sites of the nice developers.)

Most archeology in Manhattan today is what is called "contract archeology." A private, profit-making archeological firm is hired by the developer to excavate, with the developer desperately hoping that the contract digger finds nothing worth preserving, or, at least, that what he finds is the cheerful, pipes-and-coins sort of objects that you can put in a vitrine in the lobby or use to suggest a name for the restaurant on the ground floor (The Firste Coine), rather than a pile of bones, say, that a touchy minority group might barge in and claim as relatives. There is a certain amount of tension between contract archeologists, whose primary loyalty, after all, is to the developer who is paying for the shovels, and academic archeologists like Cantwell and Wall, who see the contract archeologists more or less the way that liability lawyers see doctors hired by the insurance company: they're not saying that they're not honest, just that they can be a little quick to make a diagnosis.

The practice of archeology in Manhattan is like the practice of archeology in Troy or Sumeria, only faster and with more people watching. The developer hires a front-end loader, which strips the the top layers of rubble off a site. (The packing material of New York—the first thing you strike when you start digging—is often old diner and coffee-shop plates and cups, which fill modern archeological sites in New York the way pot shards fill Attic ones.) Then a series of test "cuts" are made, to see if anything is down there, and, once it is confirmed that there is, the archeologists dig in neat, well-ordered trenches, with every object that shows up in every spade turn recorded, down to the last fish scale and coffee bean. When the soil is damp, and clinging, the archeologists wash it off the objects by "wet-screening" it. They hook up hoses to fire hydrants to do this. In winter, the water gets everywhere, and is extremely cold. Looting is a constant problem. Occasionally, a digger will return to a site in the morning and find that the previous day's work has been removed. A mugger once ran through a dig, and construction workers at nearby building sites often like to stop and watch and evaluate the work of the archeologists, especially if the archeologists are women.

Walking through downtown Manhattan with Cantwell and Wall, one is impressed first by how comically meagre most of what has been found is—there are no masks of Agamemnon or theatre foundations to be pointed out, just one place after another where broken pipes and broken dolls and broken dishes have been dug up—and then by how much these bits and pieces contribute to understanding the continuities of life in what has been a bourgeois, mercantile city pretty much since it began. Unlike ceremonial cities, a commercial city, built on a coin, leaves behind not big things but a lot of small ones, which, in the absence of an organizing principle, can seem merely chaotic. A shower of paper and pipes and pencils settles on the city, and then settles in the ground, and only a diligent theorist, sensitive to the fine shadings of meaning found in rubble, can suddenly say not just "There were people here" but "These people were like that."

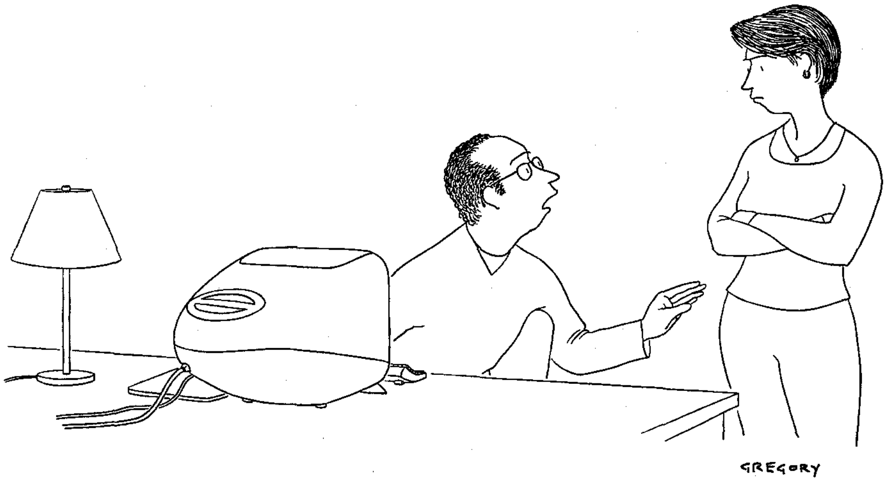
One of the big questions that Diana Wall has studied, for instance, using fragments of dishes from all over lower Manhattan, is whether middle-class women in the early nineteenth century minded being left at home alone while their husbands went out to work, as they were doing for the first time in American history around then, going to offices and factories. Historians argue about whether their wives liked this change or didn't. Some say that they missed the working environment, and some say that they were glad to have a domestic sphere to dominate. Cantwell was able to show that women in lower Manhattan were shopping for expensive china for teas and dinners even while their husbands were mostly still working at home. "Which suggests that women were redefining domestic life before the separation of home and work took place," she says. "In a way, they were walling themselves in without knowing it." Old toilets have a story to tell, too. On the Telco site, at Front and Fulton Streets, Cantwell discovered something tragic in its banality: an arrangement of privies and cisterns placed side by side in exactly the manner most likely to produce the cholera epidemics that broke out there in the early nineteenth century.

At still another site, excavated about ten years ago and called the Courthouse site, after the building that stands there now (it is also called the Five Points site, since it is in that legendary low-life place), women's glass urinals and chamber pots, along with the skeletons of newborn children and a fetus, led the archeologist Rebecca Yamin to conjecture that she had stumbled on the remains of a brothel. She later learned that a man named John Donohue had been indicted for running a "common, ill-governed and disorderly house" right on the site, and at the right time, 1843. The broken material at the site—which also included an odd combination of expensive teacups, glass bird feeders (a middle-class luxury in those days), and thirty-nine patent-medicine bottles whose labels promised treatment for venereal disease—painted a picture of the prostitutes' world, high-hearted and horrible.

People have been dying in New York for as long as people have been living here, of course, and one of the things that preoccupy Cantwell and Wall is the patterns of burial and reburial in the city since its earliest times, and the way New Yorkers have honored their dead. Partly by chance, partly because Manhattan, an island made of rock between two rivers, presents strange challenges to interment, the history of burial in New York City has been unusual.

Even Indian burials in this part of the world were odd. "The Late Woodland people in the Northeast often seemed to carry their bones with them," Cantwell says. "There's a site up in the Bronx, in Pelham Bay Park, which dates from about five hundred to a thousand years ago, and it's an ossuary, a kind of mass grave. There were twenty-one skulls and accompanying bones, and they ranged from those of adults to those of very small children. What's striking is that the sites are not sacred-precinct sites. They're associated with ordinary living. One theory is that these Late Woodland families tended to bring the bones of their dead along with them when they moved. It would have been a way of incorporating the dead into the life of the living."

Perhaps the most mysterious burial ever found in New York City is that of a child. He was buried in a Middle Woodland grave on Staten Island around the year 500 A.D. "He's a child of about six, and his grave site is a complete anomaly," Cantwell explained. "It's filled with all kinds of expensive grave goods—pieces of a copper mask, beads, beaver-tooth ornaments, pipes, and a face-painting receptacle made from the jaw of a lynx. There isn't another grave site like it anywhere in the area." The grave was discovered a hundred years ago, and it is as



"I swear I wasn't looking at smut—I was just stealing music."

little understood now as it was then. "Was he the child of wealthy out-of-towners who came here trading and had their own, alien burial ritual? Or were they simply local people who had somehow acquired these things and were expressing the dimensions of their grief?"

In the eighteenth century, when New York became a center of world trade, burying people became still more complicated, because the demands of memorializing the dead came into conflict with the city's growth. Unlike Paris and London, where Père-Lachaise and Highgate Cemetery mourn the celebrated in the middle of the city, Manhattan has only a few remaining church graveyards. (One of the reasons the quintessential old New York joke—"Who is buried in Grant's Tomb?"—is possible is that most of Manhattan's dead are not kept in Manhattan.)

"In the early nineteenth century, the churches were forbidden to bury their dead down in the city," Wall explained. "Some of them arranged to bury their dead in Washington Square. Then the city moved the boundary south of which you couldn't bury people, and kept moving it further and further north, until you weren't allowed to bury people south of Eighty-sixth Street."

Sometimes stories of movable bones in Manhattan are almost jaunty. Anne-Marie Cantwell's favorite is about Pierre Toussaint. "There was one significant excavation of old bones at the old St. Patrick's cemetery, in 1990," she said. The Pope, it seems, wanted an American saint who was a man of color and was married. Toussaint, a hairdresser to famous people in the early nineteenth century, was the obvious choice. He was extremely generous, and gave a lot of money to the Church. Then, when he had the chance to buy his freedom, he stayed with his masters and bought the freedom of several other slaves instead.

"Of course, if you're going to have a saint, then you need relics, so the Church officials had to be sure that it was him," Cantwell said. Fortunately, it was known that he had a limp, and the general area where he was buried was also known. A team of forensic anthropologists came in, and they were able to find a skeleton with arthritis. "Now his body has been moved to the crypt under the main altar at St. Patrick's uptown, and they're hoping that his remains will do miracles," she said. "It was really fun—he's now with the princes of the Church, this enslaved Haitian who came to New York. They're still waiting for a miracle."

By now, the archeologists had arrived at Foley Square and, after a quick tour of a series of medallions that have been set discreetly in the ground to honor the immigrant groups who have passed through there, they walked over to a little green patch. This is the African Burial Ground, which is the only modern burial ground to have been excavated.

"There were burial grounds all over lower Manhattan," Wall explained. "A Jewish cemetery, an African one . . . But no one thought the African burial ground was still intact. Then, when the General Services Administration planned its new building, and the archeological work began, it became plain that there was an enormous amount of landfill ladled over the old graveyard, which meant that it was probably mostly still there. The archeologists began finding bodies right away. The forensic-anthropology team came in—the same people who had found Pierre Toussaint—and, after a lot of debate, they began work. More than four hundred burials turned up, and of course there was a lot of worry about the way they were being handled. Bones were placed in newspaper, for instance, which is the standard way of doing it, but, understandably, African-Americans in the city now had other associations with that. The archeologists switched to acid-free paper. In the end, it was decided to send the bones to a physical anthropologist at Howard University, where they could be studied."

All that is showing of the African graveyard is that unappealing patch of grass huddled alongside the bunkerlike G.S.A. building, a building so ugly that it seems to have been designed as an abbreviation for a building rather than an expression of delight in shelter. "The odd thing is that the anthropologists have pretty much finished the analysis, and the decision has been made to reinter the bones here, in what remains of the graveyard," Wall said. "They're going to be sent home. All of them." Sometime soon, perhaps later this year, a hundred New Yorkers who died and once were buried here will be returned to lower Manhattan to be buried again. ♦

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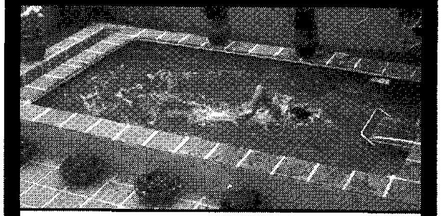

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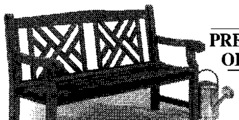

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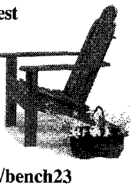

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LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

THE McCAIN CODE

From airport security to Enron, the Arizona senator keeps picking fights.

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

Senator John McCain, at the age of sixty-five, still has moments when he looks like a mischievous little boy who's hoping not to get nabbed for some bit of deviltry, and that was how he looked one Thursday morning in November just after he had arrived at work. This may have been because he had just flown into Washington on the early shuttle, after a gala evening in New York, where he spoke and received an award at a fund-raiser for the International Rescue Committee, spoke again at a dinner in honor of Mayor Rudy Giuliani, and then spent the night at the Waldorf-Astoria. McCain comes from the military aristocracy—he's John Sidney McCain III, the son and grandson of admirals, third-generation Annapolis—but New York is outside that group's ambit, so he can think of a trip there as a country boy's sojourn in the big city. It added to the little-boy feeling that McCain takes an unconcealed pleasure in being fussed over, which he had been, and in mingling with celebrities, which he had done. And that he was eating a doughnut out of a white paper bag and there was powdered sugar all over his mouth. And that he sensed a big political win coming within range—a forbidden and therefore all the more delicious win over his own party, the Republicans, who for the past year have been his usual opponents.

The issue at hand was how, in the wake of the September 11th attacks, to improve the dangerously low level of security at American airports. McCain was a principal sponsor of a bill that directed the federal government to take on the task, and which had passed in the Senate by a vote of 100–0. But the House of Representatives, which is controlled by the Republicans and is led, to all appearances, by their aggressively conservative whip, Tom DeLay, of Texas, had passed a different bill, supported by President Bush, in which security personnel at airports could continue to work for private firms. Congress was about to adjourn for Thanksgiving, and its members were terrified by the prospect of having to explain to voters at home that there would be no airport-security bill. But the two sides were far apart; a conference committee, in an atmosphere of intense pressure, was going to meet that morning. A win for McCain's side would mean that Congress had flouted the preference of a popular President in wartime.

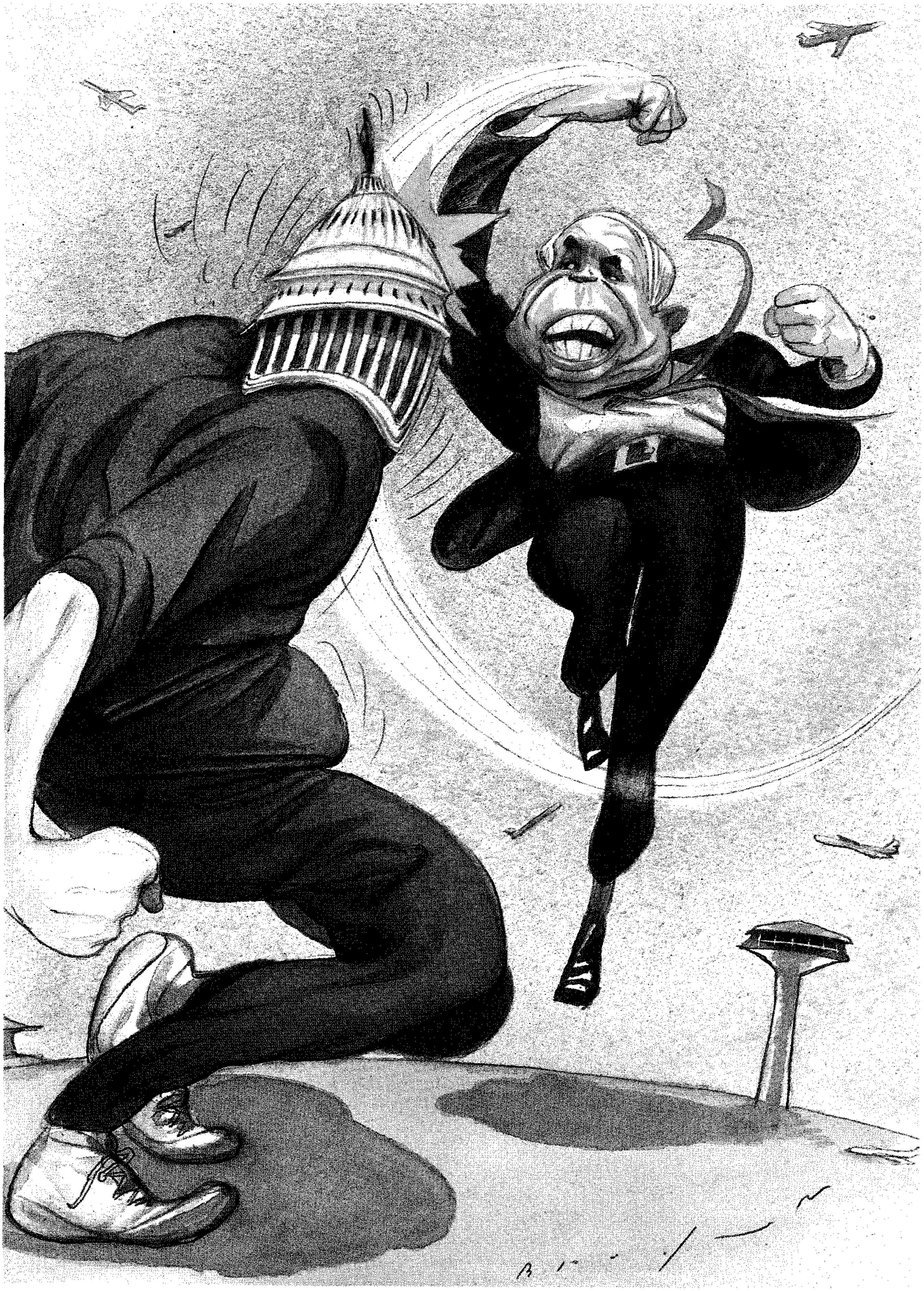
McCain wiped off the powdered sugar with a napkin and rearranged himself into a more senatorial position. McCain's father, before he became an admiral, was a submarine commander (McCain himself was a naval aviator), and the McCain operation has something of the feeling of a submarine at sea. The staff occupies a long, narrow line of offices, each room opening into the next down a hallway, at the end of which is the hearing room of the Senate Commerce Committee, McCain's principal power base (he is the ranking Republican). The vessel seems isolated, because of McCain's opposition to his colleagues' usual way of doing business. The commanding officer is a long way from his wife and children, who live in Arizona, call in a couple of times a day, and see him on weekends. There is an intense camaraderie between McCain and his aides, forged during wartime (which is to say, the 2000 Republican Presidential-primary campaign), and they switch back and forth a lot between insouciance and discipline. McCain's own office sits roughly in the middle of the line, and his aides wander in and out all day as if it were center stage in a drawing-room comedy.

"Yesterday, we discussed making all airport security federal, and after a period of time they"—the airports—"could opt for private security," McCain said. "We agreed, at least in principle. It will be interesting to see what the blowback is, because the hard-line people won't like it. The White House got in a bad position on this. Norm Mineta"—the Transportation Secretary—"met with us and basically agreed on federalizing the employees. Then he went to the White House and was excoriated. Tom DeLay"—never directly in view but never out of mind in McCain's office, like the enemy destroyer the sub is chasing—"got them to agree to vigorously oppose us, to the point where they spent days in the White House bringing people in. Remarkable, in the middle of a war. They wound up buying votes. They bought the New York congressional delegation by putting in a World Trade Center liability provision. And they won in the House by four votes. There was a quote by DeLay that this was the toughest vote since impeachment. Remarkable!"

McCain interrupted himself to call out, loud enough to be heard up and down the row of offices, "Where's Buse?" Mark Buse, or "the ferret," as McCain sometimes calls him, was the Republican staff director of the Commerce Committee. Buse is as close to a downtown-looking guy as you can find in Washington—he is clean-shaven but has two-day-stubble-length hair and sideburns and wears earth-toned suits—and, though not yet forty, had been working for McCain for eighteen years. In McCain's office, much of every day is spent trying to thwart politicians' attempts to help interest groups by sneaking provisions into unrelated pieces of legislation—a practice that seemed to McCain to have stepped up since September 11th. Buse was one of the lead actors in this struggle, and McCain wanted him as a witness, to make sure he was getting the details right.

Mark Salter, a sad-eyed, bearded, perpetually on-watch man who is McCain's chief aide, speechwriter, and alter ego, wandered in, and so did Nancy Ives, McCain's very busy communications director. In common with most politicians, McCain likes company. The more crowded his office got, the happier and more voluble he seemed to become. The conference committee was due to meet in a

STEVE BRODNER



In Washington politics, John McCain has crossed the line from being "non-regulation" to being seriously disaffected.

few minutes. "So we won't agree," he said. "There'll be a lot of talk for an hour and we'll break up. But the House doesn't want to go home for Thanksgiving without a deal. We'll keep up the pressure through the day. We'll hold fast."

McCain likes to do imitations. He put on a gruff, blustery, stagily tough voice, in order to play an unspecified House member of the Republican apparatchik type, and said, "If I let them federalize airport security, then I'd have a bunch of new union members who'd vote Democratic!" He rolled his eyes and went back to being himself. "They got off that kick. Then it was"—a different voice, that of a White House water carrier wearing patriotic garb—" 'Give the President flexibility. We're in a war.'

"They've hired every lobbyist in Washington," McCain said—"they" being the private security firms, whose lapses on September 11th have become notorious. McCain attributes most of the failings of the political system to the malign influence of campaign contributions, so he was sure that the support the security firms were getting had to do with money that they were spreading around the Capitol. "We won't see the disclosure statements till January. You'll see huge contributions. Huge!"

Every so often during this disquisition, McCain would look at Mark Buse for confirmation, Buse would nod vigorously, and McCain's temperature would rise. "They're saving defense appropriations for last," he said. McCain likes to say that there are three kinds of senators—Democrats, Republicans, and Appropriators. The last category comprises members of the Appropriations Committee, whose control of the government's cash gives them unusual power, which they use with relish. "You've got the war-profiteering angle here. You can't vote against defense in a war. I can guarantee you. It'll come late, right before Christmas. Everybody will want to be out of here and they won't read the bill. It will be a bonanza."

Another aide, Dan McKivergan, the legislative director, walked in. "What?" McCain said.

"Sir, the Vietnamese-catfish language is still in the agriculture appropriations bill. They put in language saying that Vietnamese catfish can't be labelled as catfish in America." A minor cause of McCain's is permitting the sale in American supermarkets of Vietnamese catfish, but the domestic catfish industry hates the idea and wants to require that the Vietnamese fish, which to the untrained palate taste like catfish but which are of a different species from the American version, be sold under a different name.

"Another victory for American agribusiness!" McCain said. "And for Mississippi. Big catfish industry in Mississippi." Mississippi is the home state of Trent Lott, who, as the leader of the Republicans in the Senate, ought to be, but isn't, the person from whom McCain takes his signals. McCain glanced at Buse. "So now we have to jump into agriculture." Buse nodded.

It was time for the meeting on the airport-security bill. McCain, Mark Buse, Nancy Ives, and Rob Chamberlin, who is tall, with a boyish mop of brown hair, and who works as the Commerce Committee's aviation expert, left the office and walked down the hallway of the Russell Senate Office Building, McCain leading at a brisk trot. He is a short man, with spindly legs and thick shoulders and a face that cartoonists dream about: slightly trapezoidal head, white slicked-across hair, black eyebrows, small eyes, button nose, and a wide, expressive, elastic mouth that does all the communications work for the rest of his face. McCain's car, a green Lincoln, was parked outside. "Get in, you brats!" he said, and climbed into the driver's seat. The conference was in the Rayburn House Office Building, just a few blocks away, but there were several security checkpoints, so the drive took longer than you'd expect. On the way, McCain reminisced about his evening in New York. "Bette Midler was great last night," he said. "Tony Bennett was marvellous. Natalie Cole did that thing where she sings the duet with her father on a screen. Joel Grey sang 'Yankee Doodle Dandy.' I loved what Bette said about Rudy Giuliani." (McCain considers Giuliani—tough, blunt, but not a Tom DeLay Republican—to be his political soul mate.) " 'He has a heart of gold and balls of steel.' "

McCain pulled up in front of the Rayburn Building and led his platoon inside. In the hallway, he ran into another member of the conference committee, Senator John Kerry, of Massachusetts, who towers over him. Kerry, an extremely handsome man with a head chiselled from marble, is, like McCain, a Vietnam veteran and a possible candidate for President in 2004, but somehow he is not nearly so good as McCain at planting himself squarely in the middle of the public's attention. McCain hummed the tune of "New York, New York" and did a little jig. "They let me stay in the Waldorf-Astoria last night, John," he said. Kerry gave him an affectionately exasperated look that seemed to communicate the sentiment that he knew he was being successfully teased but couldn't think of a good comeback, so he'd have to let McCain get away with it. Everyone disappeared into the office of Representative Don Young, of Alaska, where the conference committee was meeting, except Nancy Ives, who stayed out in the hallway to tend to reporters. On the wall of Young's reception area was mounted the huge pelt of a Kodiak bear.

After more than an hour had passed, Senator Ernest (Fritz) Hollings, of South Carolina, the Democratic chairman of the Commerce Committee, stood in the hallway and proclaimed in his patrician Low Country drawl (McCain does a great imitation of it), "We in the room have gotten together. I have no details. That's it."

McCain, back in his car, had details. "Long story short: we agreed to a compromise with a couple of caveats that made sense to me." The federal government has divided all the airports in the United States into five categories, based on their size. The compromise was that security at all the airports would be federalized for at least three years, but that one airport in each category would be given the option of going private after a year. "Five airports out of four hundred. That was the major concession we made. It makes sense to me. Basically, the counterpressure on them"—the House Republicans—"from the White House was 'We want a deal.' Now they have to take it back to DeLay. If he agrees with the compromise, we all sign the conference report and Rob stays up all night writing it."

In other words, things looked promising. McCain parked at the Capitol and dashed inside to make a speech on the Senate floor about Vietnamese catfish.

When McCain got back to his office, Nancy Ives came in. "What, my princess?" McCain said, with a wicked grin. Ives had been in New York the night before, too, but after the official

"That's probably my wife—she has global reach."

events she had gone out with friends to Dorrian's, an Upper East Side bar. McCain had made it a minor theme of the day to tease her for being hung over, which, to all appearances, she wasn't; every time he thought of it he reminded her that her throat was dry and her head was aching. "We have an old Navy saying: 'If you want to soar with the eagles by day, you can't hoot with the owls at night.' "

Ives rolled her eyes and from a binder read a list of the cream of the day's media requests: Jim Lehrer's "NewsHour," on PBS; Aaron Brown's late-night show, on CNN; Fox News; CNBC—and Adam Clymer, of the New York *Times*, was on the phone right now. Before McCain had a chance to take the call, his phone rang. He listened for a moment and then started yelling. Another of his modes is the gruff commander, his chin tucked down into his collarbone and his voice a growl. "God damn it!" he said into the phone. "We were very clear about it. He can't stop it!" He hung up. "Now Hollings is saying he didn't understand the deal was going into effect immediately," he said to his assembled aides, shaking his head. McCain was nervous about the possibility of the bill's getting waylaid, and he was taking what was actually an attempt to clarify the details of the exception for five airports as a sign of possible trouble—waffling on Hollings's part. "That was his staff guy. He agrees with us."

McCain picked up the line on which Adam Clymer was waiting and had a short conversation about the urgent necessity of closing military bases. When he hung up, he resumed the discussion about Hollings. "When DeLay and the White House have all signed off, when all the other members of the conference have signed off, then we talk to Hollings about it. Buse!"

Buse appeared. "Mark, our boy Kevin just called." That was the call that had momentarily annoyed McCain. "He said Fritz didn't understand the deal." Buse sighed.

McCain had to go to the Senate floor for a vote on another bill, and when he got back Mark Salter was waiting with good news. "Hollings understands now," he said. "Kerry talked to him. Lott went over and talked to DeLay personally. He understands. So we're done." McCain smiled triumphantly—but a bit prematurely, because Salter had been sugarcoating the situation slightly. Tom DeLay, though he'd agreed to the federal government's takeover of airport security, got to keep a provision limiting the amount of damages that Boeing, the country's leading manufacturer of commercial aircraft, including all the planes that were hijacked on September 11th, would have to pay in future lawsuits. McCain didn't like the idea that DeLay could mess with his legislation. Couldn't they get Boeing out of the bill?

McCain loves to play the rebel. The dynamic of his office is therefore not the usual one of the practical boss restraining the idealistic staff but the reverse—which doesn't necessarily mean that McCain is against all cautious outcomes, only that he doesn't like them to have been his idea.

The play was to Mark Salter, because, although he isn't the most knowledgeable member of the staff on the policy details of every bill, he's the one McCain trusts most to figure out what the McCain thing to do is. Softly, but with a firm note in his voice, Salter said, "You'll be the only one who objected to it."

McCain grimaced. "O.K."

Buse chimed in. "We're drafting it right now," he said brightly. "We'll get it done late-late and move it tomorrow."

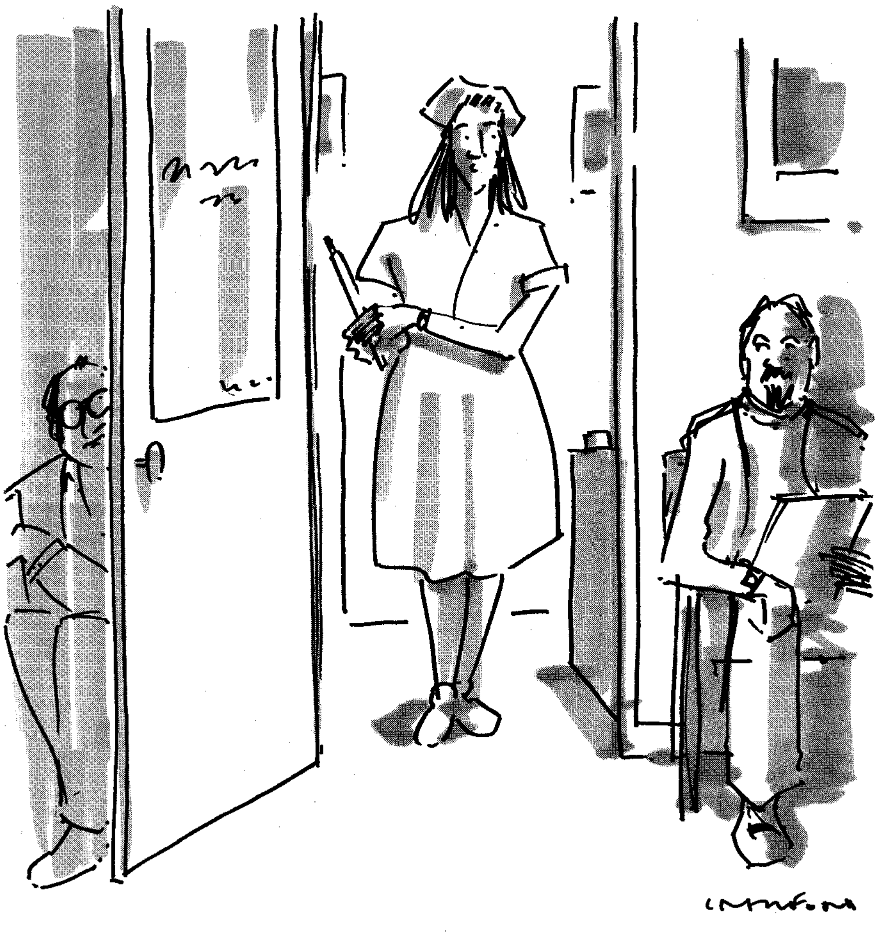
Ellen Cahill, McCain's scheduler and phone-call handler, appeared. "Joan Glick is on the phone, and she's desperate to talk to you," she said. Joan Glick is the mother of Jeremy Glick, one of the brave passengers on United Flight 93 who took on the September 11th hijackers, with the result that the plane crashed outside Pittsburgh instead of flying on to Washington and possibly hitting the Capitol. The heroes of Flight 93 may have saved the lives of most of the members of Congress, but somehow the families have fastened on McCain as their friend at court. In late September, he flew out to San Francisco and delivered a eulogy at the funeral of Mark Bingham, another Flight 93 passenger, and now Joan Glick was calling him about the airport-security bill. McCain took the number from Ellen Cahill, picked up the phone, and dialled.

He listened for some time, and then said, "I promise you, I will do everything in my power. We are close to an agreement, to get this process under way." He listened some more. As the phone call went on, two things were becoming apparent: first, that Joan Glick was talking on a cell phone with an uncertain connection, and, second, that she knew chapter and verse about the airport-security bill and wasn't going to accept McCain's assurances with simple, passive gratitude. "I can assure you that, with only five exceptions, all airports in America will have a federal security force," McCain said, when he got a chance to talk. "All federal. Federal workers. Yes, Ma'am." McCain was obviously getting chewed out now; he was taking on the post-apprehension version of the little-boy look. "I'm about to lose you, Joan. In a compromise, we put it under the Department of Transportation. Yes, I was for the Department of Justice, too. It's going to be near-autonomous, much like the F.B.I. Direct access to the President. I wanted it in the Department of Justice, but, Joan, look, they came over and said, 'We don't have the expertise, blah, blah, blah.' Well, when they say that, what can you do? But the major fight was, would they be private firms?"

The call faded, and McCain hung up and redialled. Two seconds later, Joan Glick was back on the line, still hectoring. "We had to give on that issue to get the important thing, which is federalization," McCain said. Evidently, she was finally satisfied. McCain wound it up. "I thank you. Please accept my deep and sincere sympathy. No one, no one can know what it feels like to lose a son. All I can do is everything in my power to make sure it doesn't happen again."

He hung up, shook his head wonderingly, and said to his aides, "She said I should have gotten everything."

McCain is one of a handful of members of Congress who have transcended the bounds of political fame and become secular celebrities, Hillary Clinton and Ted Kennedy being perhaps the only others. This happened for McCain quite recently, and therefore, unlike Clinton and Kennedy, he doesn't appear to approach fame with any caution or ambivalence. His apotheosis began in 1995, with the publication of "The Nightingale's Song," by Robert Timberg, an interwoven group biography of five prominent Naval Academy graduates, in which the story of McCain's five and a half years of captivity in Vietnam appeared between hard covers for the first time. In 1996, he made an eloquent nominating speech for his fellow wounded veteran and Senate colleague Bob Dole, at the Republican Convention (although he'd started the Presidential cycle as chairman of the campaign of another senator, Phil Gramm, of Texas). In 1999, McCain and Salter published "Faith of My Fathers," McCain's own version of his Vietnam story, just before he announced his long-shot Presidential campaign. Then, in the New Hampshire primary, he upset George W. Bush and won over the national press corps, which previously had identified him mainly with the Keating Five savings-and-loan scandal of the late eighties. Somehow, the idea of McCain—the war hero turned purveyor of "straight talk" and promoter of political reform—took form strongly enough during the campaign to overcome the return to semi-obscurity that awaits most defeated Presidential candidates. Tallies of who has appeared how many times on the Sunday-morning political talk shows, which is one of the ways that Washington keeps score, demonstrate that, for 2001, McCain was in first place, beating even the top congressional leaders. That statistic understates the magnitude of McCain's media exposure, since it doesn't take into account the regular appearances he makes on "Imus in the Morning," on "Larry King Live," on television news programs, in newspaper articles and on op-ed pages, and even, occasionally, on the "Tonight Show." Anytime there is a controlled experiment in media attractiveness, in which a group of senators happen to be standing in a public place where reporters can get to them directly, McCain always draws the biggest crowd—and annoyed looks from his colleagues.



"Mr. Bream, it's time for you to put on a humiliating smock and let the doctor tell you about his fishing trip to Canada."

Last year, McCain was one of only two Republicans (the other was Senator Lincoln Chafee, of Rhode Island) to vote against President Bush's most important piece of legislation, the tax-cut bill. McCain and a Democratic co-sponsor, Senator Russell Feingold, of Wisconsin, got through the Senate by a substantial margin a campaign-finance-reform bill that would ban unlimited "soft money" contributions to political parties, even though

Bush opposed it—only to see it derailed late one summer night by Tom DeLay's forces in the House. It was front-page news when McCain's aide Dan McKivergan and three other McCainiacs were heard at lunch at the Washington restaurant Bacchus speculating about his leaving the Republican Party. Then word got out that he had invited Senator Tom Daschle, of South Dakota, who, as Majority Leader, is the highest-ranking Democrat in the federal government, to his cabin in the Arizona mountains for the weekend, and that led to a major media stakeout—even though McCain insisted that the weekend was about nothing more complicated than his love of barbecuing with friends.

You would have thought that the September 11th attacks would turn McCain into a more docile figure, who saw his role as supporting the President wholeheartedly. He hasn't *not* supported the President wholeheartedly, but he has consistently found his way to positions on the war against terrorism that are different from Bush's. He wrote an op-ed piece in the *Wall Street Journal*, just before Bush announced that he was sending ground troops to Afghanistan, calling on the United States to prosecute the war as aggressively as possible. He signed a letter asking Bush to take the fight to Saddam Hussein in Iraq. In effect, McCain was placing himself one step to Bush's right on the war, and using this position to put Bush on notice that he was being watched for signs of insufficient toughness. During the fall, McCain was often in New York, appearing with Giuliani. (Fortuitously, their respective home teams, the Diamondbacks and the Yankees, were matched in the World Series, and they sat together at several nationally televised games.) And then there was the airport-security bill.

After Congress returned from its Christmas break, the wartime feeling in Washington had lessened, and so, therefore, had the feeling that political unity was a patriotic imperative. McCain was ready for that twist in the plot, too—especially since, all at once, the collapse of Enron, the giant Texas energy company, became the main issue in Washington. The Enron story made for a prize specimen in McCain's collection of cautionary tales about the propensity of corporations that want government favors to get them by giving lots of money to politicians. "I'm sad," he said last week, the sarcastic mock sorrow a very thin veneer over a great thickness of vindicated glee. "One of the greatest Americans, Ken Lay"—Enron's C.E.O.—"had to resign. What will our politicians do, without this source of money?" He dropped the irony. "I predicted it! It didn't take a high I.Q., either. Enron made a sound investment in Washington. It did them a lot of good. Where they really do well is around the edges, the insertion of an amendment into an appropriations bill"—a reference to the obscure Commodity Futures Modernization Act of 2000, which enabled Enron to expand its risky trading practices. "I think it's a full-blown scandal. I wouldn't be surprised if people went to jail." Just last week, McCain heard that the Enron scandal had caused enough Republican defections from the House leadership's position to force the reintroduction of the campaign-finance-reform bill—which would mean that a rousing fight was in the offing.

In the aggregate, McCain's activities in the year since President Bush took office raise the question—on the mind of everyone around McCain, though banned from direct discussion—of whether he is doing anything more than trying to segue from near-miss Presidential candidate to U.S. senator who tries to be effective and likes to barbecue.

Nancy Ives poked her head in and reported that Dennis Hastert, the Speaker of the House, had just publicly endorsed the airport-security compromise. The phone rang. It was Buse, calling from the room where the conference report was being written. McCain listened, frowning. Senator Ted Stevens, of Alaska, one of the Senate's most senior and most powerful members—he is the ranking Republican on the Appropriations Committee—was trying to insert an exception into the airport-security bill that would help his home state. "Tell him I do not and will not agree," McCain said. "I'm just not agreeing with it." Another call from Buse, another frown. "Just tell them it's an issue for another piece of legislation, for Christ's sake," he said into the phone. "You can't give liability protection to an entire city!" He had been told that the New York delegation wanted to add a provision to protect New York City from September 11th-related lawsuits. McCain hung up. "This is why it's important that we get it done before people start piling on. Lock it in concrete tonight, then vote tomorrow."

McCain was getting fidgety. It was two in the afternoon, and there wasn't much to do but wait for more things to go wrong. Fortunately, he had something to distract him: a meeting at the Capitol on another issue on which he is fighting Bush and most of his party—the patients' bill of rights, which would allow people to sue their health-maintenance organizations in state courts. When he got back to the office, Mark Buse was there.

"Kay Bailey Hutchison's in a panic," Buse said. Hutchison is a Republican senator from Texas and a member of the Commerce Committee. "She wants Alaska in the bill. And Hawaii. She wants another meeting of the conference committee before we have the floor debate."

"Get her on the phone," McCain said. When Hutchison was on the line, his voice took on an urgent tone somewhere between tough and pleading. "I'd never do that, Kay," he said. He listened for a minute, nodding impatiently. "Fine. That's fine. Wonderful. Kay, I will not—I promise you, Kay, dear, I will not cave on this. Kay, we are wasting our time. What would be the point of going back to conference? More amendments and more problems. Kay, we are trying to *end* the conference." Evidently, he was wearing Hutchison down. "O.K.? All right."

McCain hung up and turned to Buse. "She wants us to cave in to Alaska and Hawaii." Hawaii's senior senator, Daniel Inouye, a Democrat, is another of the Senate's most influential members. "It always happens," McCain said. "It always happens. Whatever we do around here, they always exempt Alaska and Hawaii, as if they were foreign countries."

He went off to do a couple of quick television interviews, which the evening news programs would use if the compromise held until then. When he got back, Buse came in. "The conference report is done, no problem," he said. "We've got some language about special consideration for airports in remote locations. By the way, a lobbyist called me two hours ago."

"That's why we have to close down this bazaar," McCain said. "Who?"

"One of Duberstein's people." Kenneth Duberstein, who was the White House chief of staff at the end of the Reagan Administration, is now a leading Washington lobbyist for business interests, and he was also a supporter of the McCain Presidential campaign. "I told them I'm not discussing any fucking issues."

McCain nodded. A young couple came in carrying a newborn baby. McCain stood between them and flashed a canned smile while a staff member snapped a picture; this is something that happens three or four times every day in just about every Senate office. As they were leaving, the man drew McCain aside and said he'd like to come back and talk to him privately soon.

"That was Mike Dennehy," McCain said, when they were gone. "He was our campaign manager in New Hampshire in the Presidential campaign. The baby has Down's syndrome. They knew about it beforehand." McCain is generally anti-abortion, so he has a special admiration for the Dennehys. "He had trouble getting work"—a fate common among former staff members of the McCain Presidential campaign who have tried to find jobs in the Bush-dominated Republican Party. McCain shook his head. "There are still people out there who are sore winners. The thing that's hard to understand is, they won. It's because we upset the apple cart. We rained on the parade. Bush and I have a cordial relationship—it's the other levels that don't."

By telling McCain that the bill now contained language about airports in "remote locations," Buse was saying that Alaska and Hawaii had got their exceptions, but not in too extreme a form. Now McCain had to talk himself into not objecting. He was standing up, chest puffed out, facing Buse. "It's so aggravating," he said, "but in the over-all scheme of things we got our federalization. We get it written tonight. Any opening in the bazaar will be closed this evening. And this business of New York being indemnified. They're putting too much stuff in. As soon as they see that we have a train that's leaving the station, they load it up."

Mark Salter wandered in and gave the scene—McCain, right on the verge of winning, but still pissed off, and glaring at Buse—an appraising look. He and Buse glanced meaningfully at each other. "We were the only Senate office to oppose liability protection," Buse said. "We don't have the votes."

"We won the big one," Salter said.

McCain let out a big breath. "O.K. Let's give them New York City."

Buse dashed out to get word to the writers of the conference report. In a few minutes, it would be done, and then they could go to the floor for the debate. McCain went into Nancy Ives's office and glanced at the television. On CNN, President Bush was welcoming Vladimir Putin, the Russian President, to his ranch in Crawford, Texas.

"Well, that's nice," McCain said, not entirely without sarcasm, and he went back to his office. Mark Buse returned. "The report's done," he said. "Byrd just started a speech about Thanksgiving." McCain looked over at the television set in his office, which is always tuned to closed-circuit coverage of the Senate floor, and there indeed was Senator Robert Byrd, of West Virginia, the eighty-four-year-old chairman of the Appropriations Committee, speaking in a rich Southern accent about the sentimental value of the upcoming holiday. "So we go at five-thirty."

That was just a few minutes away. McCain would have to walk over to the Capitol to manage the debate. An end-of-the-day, breeze-shooting mood settled over the office. McCain's room filled up with staff. He replayed his phone conversation with Senator Hutchison, in which he had put out the day's last fire, for the group. "I told her, 'I can't call a conference, only Hollings can,'" McCain said. "I wish I could! Back in those bygone days . . ." He made a self-mocking show of nostalgia for his chairmanship of the Commerce Committee, which he had lost a few months earlier, when Senator James Jeffords, a Vermont Republican, became an Independent and so put the Senate under Democratic control. He smiled a wistful smile, as if he were a creature from the Senate's land before time.

McCain turned to Salter. "Well, Mark, what else? Those were great remarks you wrote for me, my boy." He was thinking back to the golden evening in New York again. "Well received. I was nervous, because those were serious comments."

There might have been a touch of disbelief in the air. Usually in the McCain script, the Senator puts up a hard fight against the established interests, but in the end they beat him—ignobly, but they don't care. This time, he had won. "Oh, I forgot to tell you the greatest thing," he said to Salter. "Two tables away was the cast of 'The Sopranos,' except for Edie Falco and Gandolfini. I told Lorraine Bracco, 'I want the Russian guy back. This season, bring the Russian guy back.' There's this scene where they try to kill him. They stuff him in the trunk of a car. Then they drive out in the woods in New Jersey. They're gonna take him out of the trunk, but he's still alive. Then he whacks 'em with a shovel and he runs away. Then they get lost—I'm fuzzy on what happens next. But he gets away. I said, 'You gotta get the Russian guy back.'"

"Faith of My Fathers," McCain's autobiography, is a true story with the built-in benefit of high drama—McCain's progression from misbehaving naval heir to heroically suffering prisoner of war in Hanoi—but even the best narrative needs a structure. What provides the armature of "Faith of My Fathers" is the Code of Conduct, a six-item guideline for prisoners of war that President Eisenhower issued in 1955, during McCain's student days at the Naval Academy. Article III of the Code says, in part, "I will accept neither parole nor special favors from the enemy."

McCain was shot down and imprisoned in October of 1967. In June of 1968, the North Vietnamese came to him with an offer of immediate release, no doubt on account of his father. Because he put a strict construction on the Code of Conduct, under which the "special favors" you couldn't accept included being released ahead of any American soldier who had been a prisoner of war longer than you, McCain turned down the offer. This decision brought him torture, more solitary confinement, and nearly five more years of imprisonment. (He was released in March, 1973.)

All that is getting to be ancient history, but it's not immaterial today. So much of life is spent in routine dealings that it is nearly impossible to tell what anyone's code of conduct might be. Is there a controlling commitment to nonstandard action lurking in there somewhere, ready to be called forth in a crisis? Which value has the power to trump all others for that person? McCain brings such questions to mind, because, not just as a young Navy officer but also as a United States senator, he consistently makes it clear that he doesn't subscribe to the same code of conduct as his colleagues. So what does determine McCain's moves?

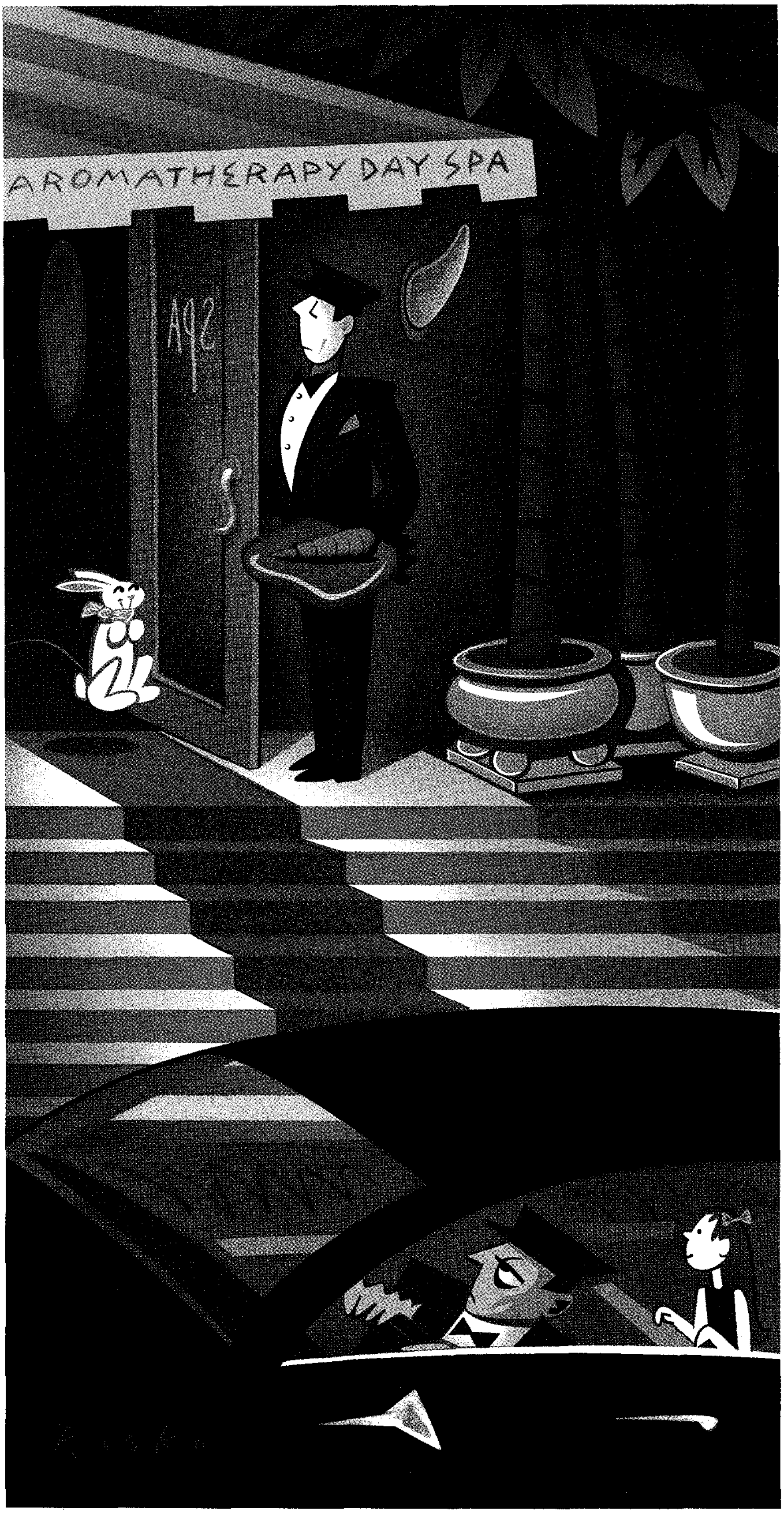
One cannot explain McCain by saying that he is an outsider to Washington and politics; he is anything but. His family, to judge from "Faith of My Fathers," has been prominent for generations, and, at the level of the Navy hierarchy where his father and grandfather ended up, one may be a true warrior, but one must also be an adept bureaucrat. When McCain first ran for Congress from Arizona, in 1982, the year after he moved there—having chosen Arizona because it was the home of his second wife, Cindy Hensley, who was seventeen years younger, beautiful, and rich—he fended off the charge of being a carpetbagger by saying that he had been born in Panama and that the place he had lived the longest was Hanoi. That was true, but it is also true that, to the extent that there was a McCain family homestead while he was growing up, it was a town house a couple of blocks from the Capitol. McCain's father was the Navy's official liaison on Capitol Hill, worked in the Capitol complex, and, with the help of McCain's mother, who had grown up rich and social, frequently entertained members of Congress. Most mornings on his way to work, Carl Vinson, the widowed chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, would drop by the McCain house for breakfast.

McCain spent much of the time between his release from prison and his move to Arizona in a variant of his father's old job, as the Navy's official liaison to the Senate, working in the same office building where he works now as a senator. McCain became close to several senators who were on the Armed Services Committee—especially Gary Hart, of Colorado; John Tower, of Texas; and William Cohen, of Maine—and gradually decided, especially as it became clearer that he was never going to make full admiral,

KIDS TODAY DEPARTMENT

Billionaire Kirk Kerkorian's ex-wife is asking a court for $320,000 a month to care for their 3-year-old daughter, the biggest child-support request ever in California. In court documents filed last week, Lisa Bonder Kerkorian lists monthly expenses for daughter Kira including . . . $436 for care of Kira's bunny and other pets.

—*Associated Press.*



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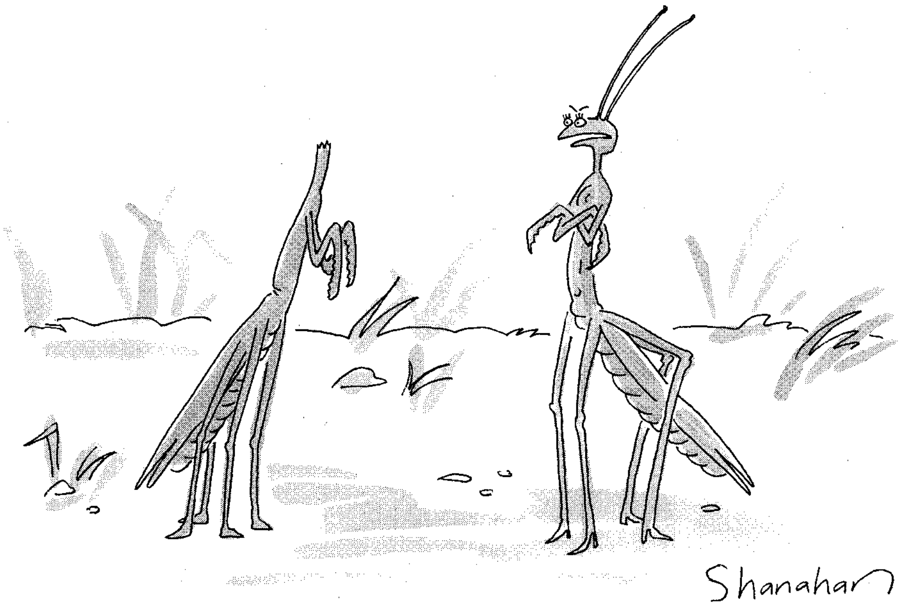

"You slept with her, didn't you?"

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that they were what he wanted to be when he grew up. When McCain retired from the Navy, in 1981, Senator Tower gave a going-away party—but McCain wasn't planning to go away for all that long. The following year, he was elected to the House, and four years after that to the Senate. For the majority of his life since his release from prison, McCain has been on Capitol Hill. He knows the rules and customs of the place intimately.

In some ways, McCain is simply "non-regulation," as they say in the Navy. Still, he had a few experiences that disillusioned him with the Senate. The obvious one was being under investigation by his colleagues as one of the Keating Five, who had received money and favors from a crooked Arizona savings-and-loan operator. McCain felt that he'd done much less wrong than most of the others but had been kept as a member of the Five because he was the only Republican among them and the investigators wanted to look nonpartisan.

A less obvious but possibly more embittering experience was the failure, in 1989, of his old friend John Tower to become Secretary of Defense, because of rumors about Tower's drinking and womanizing. To begin with, a former Navy flier like McCain is not the person most likely to consider after-hours drinking and womanizing to be a disqualifier for a job, but it bothered him when his colleagues adopted the doubly misleading pose of having nothing to do with the rumors and being deeply troubled by them. Worse, people who had been Tower's friends abandoned him when supporting him became inconvenient—and that's hugely against the Code. There were relationships with colleagues that McCain terminated because of Tower.

In the case of the Senate, and in Washington politics generally, McCain has crossed the line from non-regulation to seriously disaffected. That never happened in the case of the Navy. Even now, more than twenty years after retirement, McCain is Navy through and through. If you call McCain's office and get put on hold, the music you hear is the Navy fight song. Despite having been constantly in trouble for minor infractions of the rules when he was a student there, McCain revisits Annapolis regularly, and he always seems to return from a visit with a special spring in his step. His closest friends are Navy buddies. McCain's views on military matters are hawkish as hell—they're what he was brought up on, and despite his rebellion against the Navy on the small issues he never rebelled ideologically.

In the realm of domestic party politics, on the other hand, McCain's objection to the way business is ordinarily conducted is deep and real, evidently more so the higher the level of politics. One of the things that a skillful politician does is develop a vivid symbolic shorthand for getting his ideas across. For McCain, the symbol is soft money—the enormous contributions to parties, supposedly for educational efforts, that have emerged in the last decade as the main loophole in the campaign-finance laws.

But campaign-finance reform is just the most convenient example of a much broader McCain critique, which has the feeling of a military man's disapproval of civilian America. The military is by far the most substantial alternative culture in the United States. Military life is practically the only life lived by millions and millions of Americans that isn't about money. Military people have thrown in their lot with the Republican Party, the party of business, because they see it as also being the party of commitment to national defense, but that alliance obscures a deep feeling of discomfort that many military people have with the relentless commercialism and individualism of American life. In the Navy, you're never supposed to take a position on something important because of what's good for you personally, only because of what best serves your colleagues, the institution, and your principles—that's the heart of the Code. The military idea is that one must set aside self-interest in favor of the national interest.

McCain has had only one job, briefly, in the private sector (which itself is a term that only people in Washington seem to use in conversation), as a public-relations man for his father-in-law's Arizona beer distributorship—probably not an experience to persuade one of the nobility of life in the marketplace. It is American capitalism's least attractive side that generally presents itself to people in Washington—the constant pressing for some special government-conferred advantage, accompanied by self-congratulatory rhetoric about the free market. In conversation, McCain often expresses wonderment at the latest example of the peculiar mores of the civilian élite. People who work for investment firms appear on television shows and tout stocks, without letting on that they have a personal financial stake in their recommendations. His teen-age son, Jack (officially, John Sidney McCain IV), gets invited to a friend's bar mitzvah, and it's held at the Biltmore, Phoenix's ritziest hotel—a party for a kid! The country goes to war, and what seems like five minutes later McCain's colleagues are lobbying relentlessly to reopen nearby Reagan National Airport so they can save themselves the long commute to Dulles.

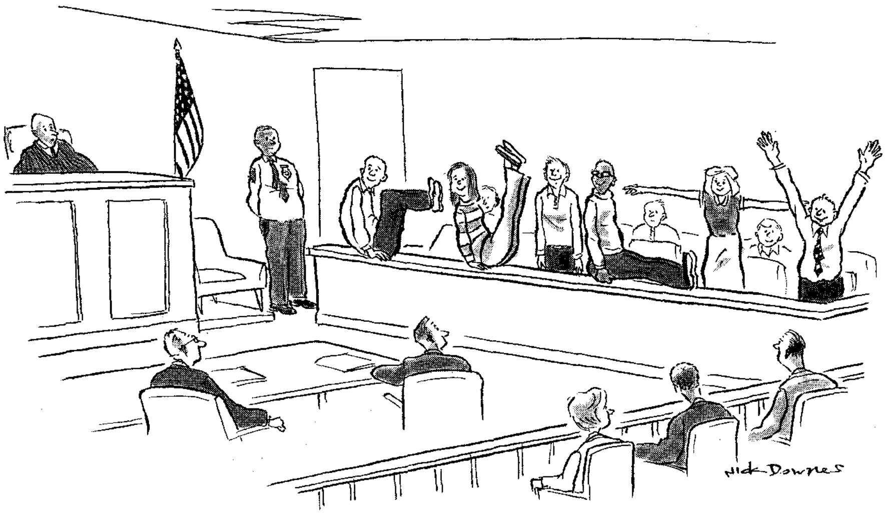
Most of the items in McCain's political program can be seen as attempts to import the military ethos into the civilian political realm. An expanded national-service corps, the subject of another ambitious McCain bill with a Democratic co-sponsor, Senator Evan Bayh, of Indiana, is meant to encourage young people to do more for their country. The military is a cradle-to-grave welfare state, with housing, schools, health care, and pensions; during the Presidential campaign, McCain was shocked by the stories he'd hear at town meetings about how bad ordinary people's access to decent medical care is, and that caused him to become an enthusiastic supporter of the patients' bill of rights, which should come up early this year. The overarching principle to which he always returns is an American politics that transcends self-interest. That's not the vision of the Founding Fathers, who imagined an intricate balance of interests. It's pure Navy.

The person who might seem to outsiders to be quite like you, but who you feel is utterly different in every important way, tends to occupy a lot of psychological space. George W. Bush, like McCain, is the son and grandson of men who got to the top level of public life. Like McCain, he went to boarding school and then on to his father's and grandfather's élite college, where he partied hard, made lots of friends, and got bad grades. Like McCain, he continued to follow the prescribed family path, in his case business leading to politics. And both Bush and McCain became military aviators. But, while McCain was a prisoner of war, Bush was far back in the rear echelon, serving, sporadically, in a National Guard unit heavily populated by well-born young men who had elected to do just what McCain wouldn't—use their position to get a special deal unavailable to people without connections. When they ran against each other for President, Bush raised funds as no Presidential candidate had ever raised funds before, to the point that he frightened most of his opponents out of the race. McCain was, relatively speaking, broke. So, even though there was theoretically nothing personal in the race and it was just a good hard clean fight, Code issues were in play from the beginning.

Then came the South Carolina primary, which lingers bitterly in the memory of McCain's circle—and not just because McCain suffered a loss that effectively finished off his campaign. Word got back to the McCain camp that floating around in a shadowy world of leaflets and telephone trees and mass E-mails and blast faxes was material falsely accusing McCain of having given his wife a venereal disease so severe that she'd had to undergo a hysterectomy, of having fathered a child by a black prostitute (this being a reference to the McCains' adopted Bangladeshi daughter, Bridget), and of having committed treason while a prisoner of war. "People did what they shouldn't have done," Mark Salter says. "People associated with the Bush campaign did things McCain would never have done, ever. Not Bush personally. It was sort of 'Let a hundred flowers bloom.' You do it with a nod and a wink." In the end, the primary was a cultural-political harbinger of the November election, producing an in-state version of Red America and Blue America, with McCain carrying coastal South Carolina and Bush the uplands. The difference between Bush and McCain is not a casual or superficial one. Bush appears truly to believe in limited government in a way that McCain truly doesn't; Bush valorizes business in a way that McCain doesn't; Bush practices politics by means of trying to assemble existing groups into a majority coalition, McCain by promoting the idea of the general good to independent voters.

Every so often, a hyperkinetic man with sharp features and slicked-back gray hair named Rick Davis drops by McCain's Senate office, just to check in. Davis is a political operative who managed the McCain Presidential campaign, and now—well, he's just checking in. McCain's friends run the gamut from Bob Dole and Warren Beatty to fellow former guests at the Hanoi Hilton, and they check in occasionally, as friends do. A few days before Christmas, when Congress was about to recess for the year and McCain was preparing for a long absence from Washington—a vacation in Fiji with his family, followed by a trip to Afghanistan with a delegation of senators—Rick Davis appeared in McCain's office and sat down. McCain was in especially high dudgeon that day. With the clock running down, Congress had to pass the last two appropriations bills of the year, which were also the two biggest and the two always held back for last and then loaded up with pork: defense, and a big collection of domestic programs known in Capitol slang as Labor H. There was the possibility that an economic-stimulus bill, also fully loaded, would pass as well. And the proposed ban on Vietnamese catfish had reappeared, in the form of another last-minute amendment.

If there was a single thing that McCain was maddest about, it was a provision in the defense appropriations bill under which the Air Force would lease a



fleet of a hundred 767s from Boeing, convert them into tankers, keep them for ten years, convert them back into passenger planes, and return them to Boeing for decades of productive use in commercial aviation, at a cost to the taxpayers of more than twenty billion dollars. "The defense appropriations bill will be the biggest gravy train that ever left this station," McCain announced to the aides gathered in his office. "It's loaded. This Boeing thing is the biggest ripoff I've ever seen, because of the size of it. The system has run completely amok. It used to be the occasional thing, slipping amendments into appropriations bills at the last minute"—McCain plans to propose legislation to ban this practice. "There was already a steep incline, and 9/11 has allowed a great deal of war profiteering." He directed his attention to Mark Buse. "Mark, get your antennae on and figure out what the hell's going on around here."

Buse's leaving, with a crisp "Yes, sir," gave Davis his conversational opening. "I just saw Rudman," he said. Former Senator Warren Rudman, of New Hampshire, was a McCain supporter in 2000 and had a lot to do with McCain's winning the New Hampshire primary. "He said hello. He said why don't you have dinner some time?"

"Yeah, let's get our old gang together," McCain said.

"He's upset about not being consulted," Davis said. Rudman considers himself to be, and is generally treated as, a major figure whose views on subjects ranging from the federal budget to terrorism have been prophetic—but the Bush White House, perhaps mindful of where Rudman's allegiances lay in the New Hampshire primary, ignores him. Next topic: "I talked to Halstead the other day. Very interesting guy." Ted Halstead is a young comer in Washington, the president of a relatively new centrist—which is to say, definitely not down-the-line Republican—think tank called the New America Foundation. "I want him to come to an Arizona function sometime. Get a little diversity going."

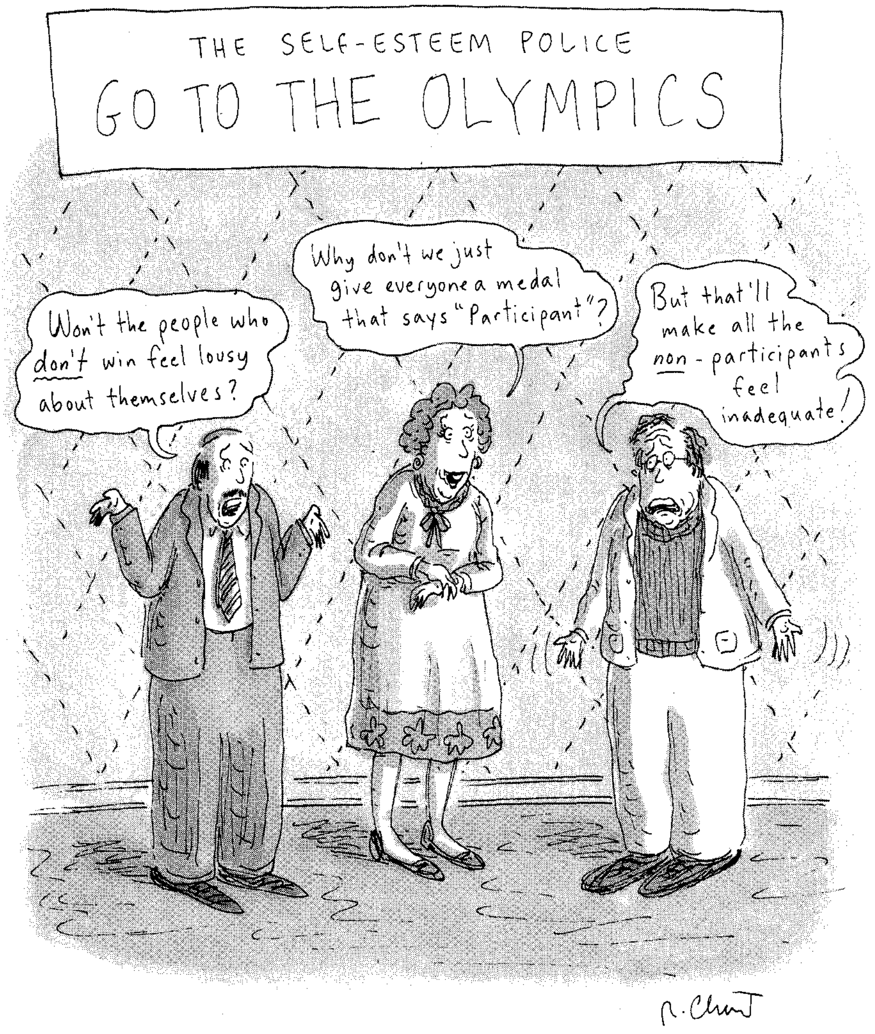
"All right," McCain said.

So goes the contemplation of McCain's future. It comes up obliquely, fairly often, in the interstices of the working day. Rick Davis comes by. John Weaver, McCain's political director in the Presidential campaign, stays closely in touch with the office. Marshall Wittmann, a prominent defector from the conservative movement (the Christian Coalition, the Heritage Foundation), who now operates an electronic newsletter called *The Bull Moose* and, as that name implies, dreams of a remake of Theodore Roosevelt's 1912 third-party campaign for President, with McCain in the starring role, speaks with McCain a couple of times a month. McCain has a political-action committee, called Straight Talk America, which donates to congressional candidates who support his agenda. He and Salter are hard at work on the second volume of his memoirs, covering the period since his release from prison. A movie version of "Faith of My Fathers" is on the way. McCain's staff is in frequent touch with the staff of the Democratic Leadership Council, the mother church of centrist Democrats, and he has developed a working relationship with the Democratic leader in the House, Richard Gephardt, to go along with his close friendship with Tom Daschle in the Senate. McCain has a near-Presidential-level public profile, a broad, coherent national legislative program, and a Presidential-campaign-worthy vision for America, domestically and abroad. Where does all that take him?

McCain will be sixty-eight years old on Election Day, 2004. Political schedules are such—a year from now, the Presidential candidates will be officially announcing—that he probably has to decide in 2002 if he's going to dare another Presidential campaign. During the last one, McCain's national name recognition soared. If the war against terrorism slowly fades from public consciousness and the economy doesn't improve, the Republicans will have to focus on how to add to their frighteningly small margin of victory the last time around. This could mean moving in a McCain-ward direction, with the White House elaborately catering to McCain, or it could mean "energizing the base"—closely attending to business interests and to fundamentalist voters, which would alienate McCain and might draw him down the third-party path that Roosevelt, his political hero, took.

What McCain and his aides are careful not to do is say that he definitely isn't going to run for President. They hem, they haw, they doubt it'll happen, but they never completely close the door. "I've kept it out of my mind," McCain says. "It's not an option that should be contemplated. You never say never, but, intellectually, it's a waste of time to think about it. I was fairly beaten." McCain can't defeat Bush for the Republican nomination in 2004, and the post-Bush election of 2008, when he'll be seventy-two, is too late for him. He could run as a third-party candidate, but third-party candidates never win—do they? The decision he has to make is a practical one but is not without a moral dimension. Where should his highest loyalty lie, with his Commander-in-Chief or with the furtherance of his political principles? Which course best fits the essential McCain standard of giving primary allegiance to something greater than yourself? Does it advance the cause more to work inside the system or try to blow the system up? What does the Code say?

What works best for McCain right now is a dynamic in which he keeps presenting tests to Bush, with the idea that, if Bush flunks, McCain might be motivated to run for President. Bush has to keep placating him, and if he doesn't McCain gets to run on the basis of principle rather than ambition, which meets a key tenet of the Code. The conduct of the war is an ongoing test, in which McCain is monitoring Bush for signs of getting soft because of a fear of asking Americans to sacrifice in an election year. Campaign-finance reform is another test. The national-service bill is another. The patients' bill of rights is another. In all these legislative cases, as long as there is a credible threat of McCain's concluding that Bush has sold out to the moneyed interests, and then deciding he has to run for President to do something about it, Bush will have a strong incentive not to lobby actively against McCain's position. The minute McCain announces he is running for reëlection to the Senate in 2004, the


THE SELF-ESTEEM POLICE
GO TO THE OLYMPICS
Won't the people who don't win feel lousy about themselves?
Why don't we just give everyone a medal that says "Participant"?
But that'll make all the non-participants feel inadequate!
R. Chast

chance of passing the bills he cares about most would diminish, and so would the press's interest in him. Another possibility is that the Senate could be evenly divided again after the fall elections, and McCain could break with the Republican Party, as Jeffords did (or, what the hell, become a Bull Moose), in return for the chairmanship of an important committee. So there's no reason for him to stop making friends with leading Democrats, either.

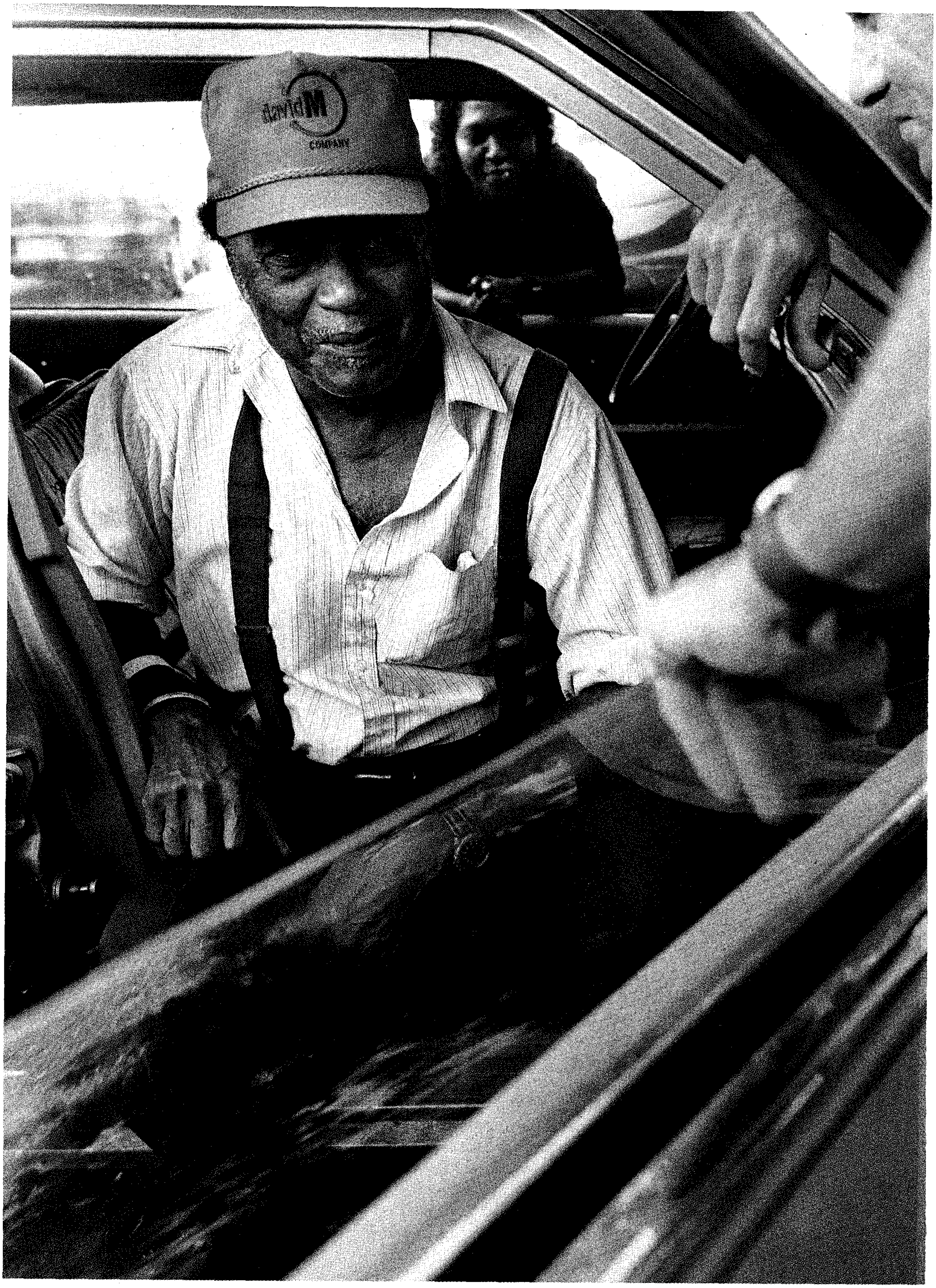
What makes McCain's situation especially dramatic is that he has skin cancer—malignant melanoma, the most deadly kind. He had a tumor removed from his back in 1993. In 2000, during the Republican Convention, doctors found new tumors in two places, his left temple and his left arm. Today, he has a nasty-looking scar on his neck where skin was taken and grafted to his temple. *Newsweek* did a cover story on McCain's cancer last August, in which he was typically forthright about the details of his treatment and wound up saying, "The good thing is, the doctors now talk about me being free and clear of cancer, for now. There's always a chance another melanoma will spring up." When I first asked him about it, he gave me a variant of the *Newsweek* answer: every three months he sees a dermatologist, who minutely inspects him from head to toe, looking for a recurrence. "As long as you get it early, it's fine," he said. "For a certain time, it just sits there. With constant attention, the odds are a thousand to one in your favor."

The medical literature, though, suggests a much bleaker prognosis. When I put this to McCain, his response was perfectly direct and amiable, though a lot less chipper. "I'm a fatalist," he said. "I know that when it's time for me to go it's time for me to go. I never thought, Here, I may die. You just, aside from being . . ." He tailed off for a moment, then picked up. "But I know you're right. Poor dear Maureen Reagan started with a place on the back of her thigh. The doctors told me all that. But the other way of looking at it is, I am extremely fortunate to be here now."

Mark Salter gave me a list of McCain's cultural heroes, all of them dashing rebels: his father and grandfather, Teddy Roosevelt, Ted Williams, Billy Mitchell (the early promoter of military air power), Marlon Brando in "Viva Zapata!," and Robert Jordan in Ernest Hemingway's "For Whom the Bell Tolls." Robert Jordan is the great Hemingway hero, an American fighting in the Spanish Civil War, romantic and brave, serving the cause of justice without having any (well, many) illusions about the Communists, defining himself through action, not thought, eating stewed rabbit and knocking down absinthe and making love on pine boughs in a cave with a beautiful Spanish girl. It's pure Code: "You have only one thing to do and you must do it"; "He was just a coward and that was the worst luck any man could have"; "Dying was nothing and he had no picture of it nor fear of it in his mind."

At the end of "For Whom the Bell Tolls," Robert Jordan accomplishes his mission, which is to blow up a bridge, but he receives a fatal wound. On a hillside overlooking the bridge, dying, he sends his stalwart compadres and his devoted Maria off to safety—if they carry him with them, it will slow them down too much and put them in danger—and has his final reflections: "You have had much luck. There are many worse things than this. Everyone has to do this, one day or another. You are not afraid of it once you know you have to do it, are you?" And then: "I have fought for what I believed in for a year now. If we win here we will win everywhere. The world is a fine place and worth the fighting for and I hate very much to leave it."

John McCain is wonderful at communicating just the same set of emotions in the face of a deadly disease: fearlessness, lack of regret, and joy in daily life. He must not know yet what his last move will be, but in the meantime it may be worth noting what Robert Jordan's last move was, since Robert Jordan embodies the Code so well. He wrenches himself and his gun into position for one final go at the enemy. ♦



David M Company

THE MUSIC SCENE

WHITE MAN AT THE DOOR

One man's mission to record the "dirty blues"—before everyone dies.

BY JAY McINERNEY

R. L. Burnside sits in a folding chair backstage at the Village Underground, in New York, mopping his brow with a towel and sipping from a half pint of Jack Daniel's. With his hair upswept in two graying wings from his massive forehead, he resembles an impishly smiling version of the famous portrait of Frederick Douglass. At seventy-five, Burnside exudes a jaded, bullish vitality. Wearing red suspenders over a faded flannel shirt, hunter-green pants, and muddy yellow work boots, he looks as though he's just come from a day in the fields, driving a tractor—which is the way he has supported himself for most of his life.

Well-wishers are surging backstage; one by one they approach and then crouch down to pay their respects. Introductions are conducted by a dishevelled young white man, rail-thin in a T-shirt and jeans. This is Matthew Johnson, the head of Fat Possum Records. At almost any hour of the day, Johnson gives the impression of having just got out of bed after a sleepless night. Without benefit of gel or deliberate grooming, his short sandy hair achieves that pointing-in-seventeen-directions-at-once look that's become so fashionable in recent years. Despite the triumphal nature of the occasion—a sold-out, celebrity-ridden New York gig by a musician whom he has almost single-handedly rescued from poverty and obscurity—Matthew Johnson has the worried, resigned expression of a man who knows that things can only get worse—and will.

"R.L., this is Uma Thurman," Johnson says in a weary drawl.

"Matthew tells me y'all are in the movies," Burnside says politely, and promises to look out for her pictures when he gets home to Mississippi. Debra Winger says hello. As Richard Gere approaches, Matthew Johnson reminds Burnside that he has met the actor before, when he played at Gere's recent birthday party in Manhattan. "Oh, sure," Burnside says. "I remember him. He had all them monks at his party." The bluesman had never heard of Richard Gere; his concern was whether the gig paid in cash. He was worried about endangering his monthly welfare check.

"That was one of the good gigs," Johnson remarks. "R.L. actually showed up for that one."

For the past decade, Johnson, who is thirty-two, has made a mission of finding and recording the last of the Mississippi bluesmen—the inheritors of the legacy of Charley Patton and Robert Johnson—making him perhaps the last in a long line of white blues entrepreneurs and preservationists from Alan Lomax to Leonard Chess, although he speaks disdainfully of "blues geeks" and is a controversial figure in the blues community. (A recent Fat Possum compilation was called, provocatively, "Not the Same Old Blues Crap.") Crisscrossing Mississippi, the poorest, most racially divided state in the Union, Johnson knocks on the doors of trailers and shotgun shacks, chasing down rumors of guitar-playing tractor drivers and welders, searching for the living remains of a tradition that stretches back to the beginning of the twentieth century. ("I wish I had a dollar for every time I heard some kid shout, 'White man at the door,' " Johnson says.) His discoveries are not necessarily the best singers or guitar players in Mississippi. Johnson is looking for something else—something raw and original, a kind of authenticity that some might call soul. "All I care about is that

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LARRY FINK

R. L. Burnside, the guitarist, with his sister and his record-company manager, Matthew Johnson, in Oxford, Mississippi.

they have a signature," he says. "I can find a guitar wizard in every mall guitar shop in America."

Fat Possum now has a stable of septuagenarian bluesmen, and a following that includes Bono, Beck, and Iggy Pop (who describes Fat Possum as "the most uncorrupted label in America"). Mississippi blues—as opposed to Chicago blues—is supposed to be acoustic and folky, but the Fat Possum sound is grungy, repetitive, and amplified, more back alley than front porch. In many ways, it seems closer to punk rock than to, say, the jazzy virtuoso riffs of B. B. King, or the polite homages of Eric Clapton. Some have called it "dirty blues," although that phrase is almost laughably redundant.

Fat Possum artists seem to share a background of sharecropping, illiteracy, poverty, alcohol abuse, and prison time. Burnside is a convicted killer, as is T-Model Ford, the crudest and most exuberant of the Fat Possum lot. T-Model Ford's drummer, Spam, lost several fingertips to a girlfriend with a box cutter. Seventy-four-year-old Cedell Davis, crippled with polio as a child, was crushed and nearly killed in a barroom stampede set off by a police raid. Paul (Wine) Jones, a part-time welder, is the only Fat Possum artist who's young and fit enough to play an entire set standing up, although he is sometimes not sober enough to do so. Johnson is suspicious of all blues clichés, including the one that says you've got to suffer before you can sing the blues, but he concedes, "My artists have all had hard lives, and that's reflected in the music."

"My whole livelihood is based on a guy who doesn't give a rat's ass about anything," Johnson says of R. L. Burnside. We're in the hill country near Holly Springs, Mississippi—Johnson at the wheel of his Chevy pickup—heading for Burnside's house. "That's what attracted me to him. He's incorruptible because he just doesn't care. As soon as he got good enough where people wanted to hear him play, he stopped having a guitar. Now he borrows guitars and people give them to him. He'll play anything you put in his hands. I can't even tell you how many 'authentic' R. L. Burnside guitars we've sold to collectors in Japan."

The Burnside residence is a compact dilapidated brick ranch set back from the highway. The front yard is full of vehicles, many of which appear to be enjoying a well-earned retirement. Two years ago, the county hauled away twelve of them. Johnson is relieved when he recognizes one of the cars as Burnside's current ride; otherwise, there is no way of knowing if Burnside is home (typically, he never picks up the phone). Two small children are playing on the porch. At our approach, they retreat inside the screen door. Eventually, Alice, Burnside's wife of fifty-one years, sticks her head out the door and nods at Johnson.

Inside, two young couples are sprawled on fraying couches, watching a daytime soap. From a central overhead light fixture, extension cords cascade in every direction, like ribbons from a maypole. Alice leads us through the kitchen to the master bedroom, the door of which hangs at a wounded angle, a jagged hole showing where the doorknob should be. Burnside is stretched out on the double bed, recovering from a recent operation. It's hard to hear anything above the din of the television. The room is stifling and fetid. Roaches run up the panelling on the wall behind the bed. Sharp screws protrude hazardously from the bedposts where the finials used to be. Clothes are piled everywhere. A full-sized refrigerator sits in the corner, and a chain and a padlock secure its door, which has no handle: with so many dependents—at any given time, several of his twelve children, as well as their children, are in residence—Burnside feels obliged to protect his food supplies. After a while, Johnson persuades Alice to turn down the TV.

"I got a check for you," Johnson says.

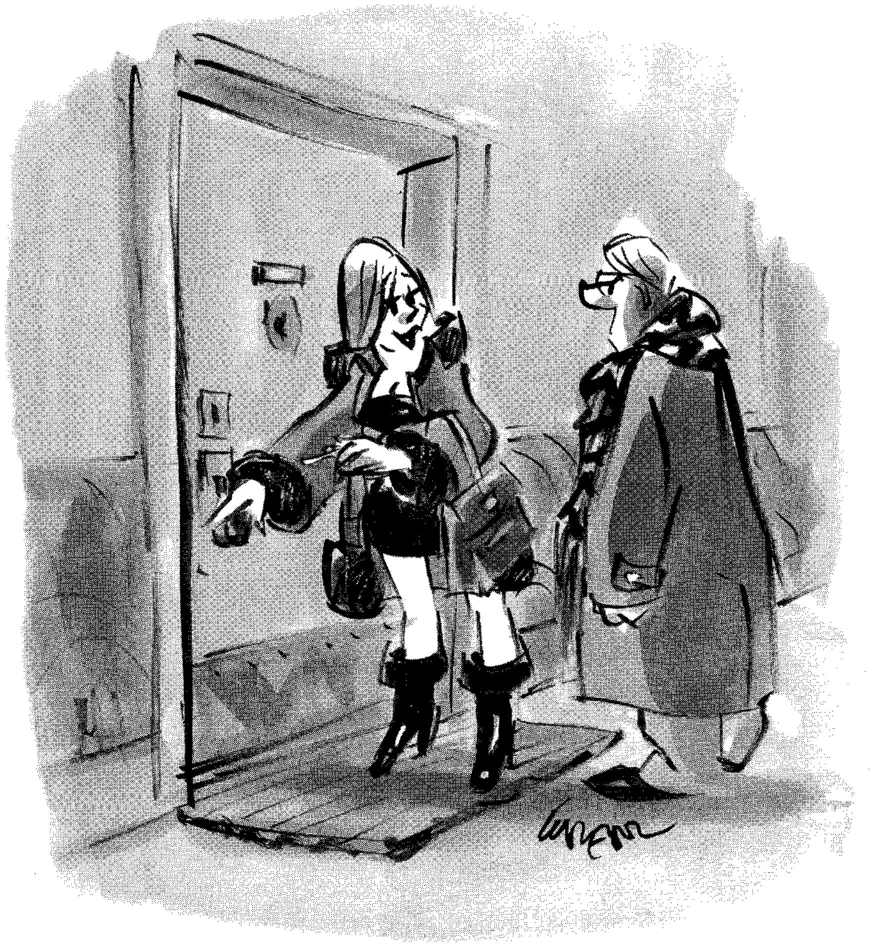
Burnside looks vaguely worried. "Last time, they told me you had to sign it."

"It's made out to you," Johnson says.

"They cut my welfare forty-eight dollars this month," Burnside says. "Maybe you could go talk to them."

"R.L., God damn it, I ain't going to go lie for you again."

The check is for nine hundred dollars, but Burnside seems more concerned about his welfare payment—some three hundred and ninety dollars a month, de-



"I'd love to ask you in, Howard, but I need some time to digest everything you told me about the Ottoman Empire."

spite the fact that last year he earned around $175,000. (Burnside was struck from the welfare rolls shortly after my visit.)

"I had to pay three hundred twenty-eight dollars at the hospital," he complains.

"You can afford it," Johnson says.

Burnside shakes his huge head. "I don't know." You get the idea that the money he earns playing isn't nearly as real to him as the government-assistance checks.

Rural Burnside was born a few miles away, in Harmontown, which has since been flooded by the Mississippi. Like many sharecroppers, he moved north to Chicago in the late forties in search of a better life; since the invention of the mechanical harvester, the Illinois Central Railroad line has been the main artery of migration. (A hundred and fifty-four thousand blacks from the South moved to Chicago in the forties, about half of them from Mississippi.) Burnside could play guitar; he was taught by a neighbor, the legendary Mississippi Fred McDowell. In Chicago, he met Muddy Waters; one of his cousins had married the bluesman at the very time he was developing the new electric sound that would make him one of the most important popular musicians of the century—the godfather of the Chicago blues and the idol of British-invasion rockers like Eric Clapton and Keith Richards. (Listening to Burnside today, you can hear the influence of Muddy Waters; like his cousin-in-law, Burnside has made a signature of the song "Rollin' and Tumblin'.") But Burnside found Chicago dangerous and unwelcoming, and he left the city after his father, two of his brothers, and an uncle were murdered there.

"My daddy, they stabbed him about twenty-five or thirty times, and nobody ever went to jail for it," Burnside says. "I had two brothers, two uncles, and my father got killed the same year. My brother, he was a doctor—he let 'em have a little dope or something and then they killed him. They killed one of my uncles. Husband come home and caught him out with his wife and killed him. I don't know what happened to my other uncle. Yeah, I'm glad I made it out of there."

Things weren't much better back in Mississippi. Burnside found that he was being harassed by a local bully who wanted to run him off his own place. "He was trying to take over my house," Burnside explains, as he lies back on the bed and glances up at the silent face of Maury Povich on the television. "He thought he was bad. It's always the bad folks who gets killed. Them scared folks kill 'em. I told him, 'Don't come around no more,' and then he was here, so I shot him." When Burnside was brought up on homicide charges, the judge asked him if he had intended to kill the man. "It was between him and the Lord, him dyin'," Burnside says. "I just shot him in the head." (He delivers this little chestnut with a smile, a perfect pause before the punch line.) Burnside was convicted and sent to Parchman, the notorious Mississippi prison that has featured in so many blues songs. In some ways, life at Parchman resembled life outside; inmates served on work gangs, chopping and picking cotton. "We had to pick two hundred pounds a day," Burnside recalls. After serving six months, he was sprung through the influence of the white plantation foreman, who needed him for the cotton harvest.

Burnside spent several years in the Delta and several more in Memphis, where he says he saw B. B. King playing on Beale Street with a cup in front of him. Somewhere along the way, Burnside developed his own style of blues, and with each passing year his voice seems to get richer and deeper and more distinct. "Everything he touches becomes his," Johnson says. "It's what we call Burnside style. In the case of inanimate objects, that's bad. I mean, you could give him a rock, come back the next day, and it would be busted. But with songs it's good.

"I remember the day I met R.L.," Johnson says as he jams Kid Rock's latest into the CD player of the pickup after we leave Burnside. "We were driving in his car. He was drunk. Every damn light on his dashboard was on, red lights flashing everywhere. There were cows on the road, and he was driving with one hand. He's definitely, like, nihilistic—in a friendly way. He loves when things go wrong. Tornadoes, hurricanes, floods—he just loves 'em."

This seems to be what really attracts Johnson to these blues-makers—this spirit of anarchy, which he also finds in modern-day pop nihilists like Eminem and Kid Rock. It's a spirit that Johnson himself comes by honestly. Until recently, at least, his own life would have made a pretty good blues song, the my-baby-left-me-my-roof's-falling-in-police-at-the-door variety. He's got a damaged lung, bad teeth, a couple of hernias, and a back catalogue of death threats. His dentist once held up a toothbrush and asked him if he'd ever seen one, to which Johnson answered, "I use one of those to clean my pistol."

When I met Johnson, seven years ago, I was morbidly fascinated by his Southern gallows humor and by the chaos of his personal life; his primary interests, besides the blues, were barmaids, firearms, trucks, no-name vodka, and the kind of drugs that keep you up for three days. I couldn't quite determine whether he was an erudite redneck or a degenerate preppie; he might have been the protagonist of a Barry Hannah novel. (And, in fact, he once took a course at Ole Miss with the gonzo prince of Southern lit.) His anthem then was Beck's "Loser," with its immortal refrain: "I'm a loser, baby, so why don't you kill me." Fat Possum Records, which was founded in 1991 with a four-thousand-dollar student loan, went bankrupt five years later, and has continually been engaged in various legal battles ever since. His publishing company is called Big Legal Mess. (Fat Possum's corporate motto, "We're Trying Our Best," may be one of the least boosterish slogans in the history of public relations.) A few years back, he posted fourteen thousand dollars in bad-check fees. When he calls the Fat Possum office from the road, he generally says, "Hey, it's Matthew. What bad stuff's happening there?" R. L. Burnside affectionately refers to him as "the head crook." With a characteristic mixture of bluster and self-deprecation, Johnson describes himself as a con man and a failed hustler; he likes to wheel and deal, to work the angles and play the odds, and getting beaten seems only to confirm his cheerful pessimism. Among his favorite publications—along with *Penthouse* and *Western Horseman*—is *Tradewinds Weekly*, one of those want-ad compendiums, which he scours in search of used trucks, farm machinery, and guns. When I first met him, he talked me into buying his '79 Mercedes diesel. (He needed the money to keep his company solvent for a few more months.) The car turned out to be stolen, as my ex-wife, Helen, discovered after she was pulled over by a Ten-

T-Model Ford outside the Fat Possum recording studio. Johnson discovered Ford singing in a juke joint in a small Delta town.

nessee state trooper, though Johnson swore he "didn't know nothing about that." Helen vowed never to speak to him again. A few weeks later, she invited him for Thanksgiving dinner, during the course of which he persuaded her to buy two horses. "You can't stay mad at Matthew," she said, even after the horse that was supposedly in foal turned out to be barren. It's a sentiment I've often heard expressed by women encountered in bars around Oxford, Mississippi. "He seems so befuddled and so vulnerable," one of them said. "He's like the Mississippi James Dean. You can't make up your mind whether to nurse him or fuck him." Some of his creditors have been less generous in their sentiments.

Fat Possum is now based in Water Valley, Mississippi, a town with a Victorian main street built during its moment of prosperity before the railroad bypassed it early in the twentieth century. Johnson lives with his wife, Lori, on a quiet street in a turn-of-the-century bungalow so sparsely and impersonally furnished that there's scarcely a trace of its occupants, except for the sunporch, where there are bookshelves well stocked with twentieth-century American fiction, including the complete works of Jim Thompson and F. Scott Fitzgerald. A few miles outside of town, Johnson owns twenty acres of woods and pastures, where he indulges in the manly Southern arts of engine repair, shooting, and heavy construction—the partial frame of a barn rises from a hilltop, its giant creosoted beams salvaged from a demolished railroad bridge.

Johnson grew up in Jackson, where his mother worked as a secretary. He never knew his father. Shipped off to the élite Hill School, in Pennsylvania, he barely graduated with what he says was a record-low average. "I hated it," he says with Holden Caulfield-esque moroseness. "Everyone sucked." From Hill, he went to the University of Mississippi in Oxford. Ole Miss was then best known for its sororities and its football team. Although Johnson nearly flunked out, he made one life-changing contact. "Robert Palmer had just left the New York *Times* to teach at Ole Miss," Johnson says. "He taught the history of rock and roll. Some girl told me Keith Richards was going to show up, so I signed up for the course. I failed because I never showed up. We got to know each other hanging out at the bars."

Palmer is the author of "Deep Blues," a highly regarded history of Mississippi and Chicago blues. "He shaped the aesthetic," Johnson says. An early advocate of the raw, electric hill-country sound of Junior Kimbrough and R. L. Burnside, Palmer encouraged Johnson to start Fat Possum, but the label's début album, Burnside's "Bad Luck City," sold only seven hundred copies. Johnson then met Phil Walden, the flamboyant founder of Capricorn Records, who agreed to distribute Fat Possum recordings, but the relationship ended in an ugly court battle that lasted for a year and a half. During that time, Johnson sold or pawned everything he owned, and called everyone he'd ever met who might be able to lend him money—including me.

He briefly discovered a savior in Isaac Tigrett, a founder of the Hard Rock Café and the House of Blues, who offered to book his acts and work out a distribution deal. Tigrett's generosity cost him dearly, however, when Walden added him to the suit against Johnson. "I had three guys die on me while that was going on," Johnson says.

Facing ruin, Johnson decided to make a party record. During the previous year, R. L. Burnside had been touring with the indie-rock group Jon Spencer Blues Explosion. Johnson had been brooding about the fact that the blues audience was largely composed of aging white baby boomers—"hippies with ponytails"—who'd first discovered the music through the British-invasion bands of the sixties. Johnson wanted to connect with an audience of his own age and younger—essentially, with Spencer's audience. While Johnson was still embroiled in court proceedings, he rented a hunting lodge near Holly Springs and recorded a raucous five-hour jam with Spencer's band and Burnside. Spencer recorded for free. The result—with a cover featuring a lurid caricature by the underground cartoonist Derek Hess which showed a leering Burnside brandishing his belt in the presence of a couple of pneumatic blondes—was "A Ass Pocket of Whiskey," which went on to sell seventy-five thousand copies.

Not everyone was amused. Spencer was attacked for political incorrectness and accused of participating in a latter-day minstrel show. And many in the blues establishment felt that Fat Possum was selling out. "The idea behind Fat Possum records," one critic wrote, "is basically to take a bunch of old blues guys who can't play very well, call that lack of skill 'soul,' and sell it to the indie-rock and punk-rock crowd instead of the usual blues audience. Why not? They embrace plenty of artists who lack skill and soul, so they should completely devour this 'dirty blues' stuff."

Johnson was unfazed: "I've been trying to sell out for years. I just never knew how before." That year, 1996, he sent Junior Kimbrough on tour with Iggy Pop, a former Stooges front man and the godfather of punk rock, and later R. L. Burnside opened for the Beastie Boys. And Johnson finally found a congenial home for his label—and some desperately needed cash—at Epitaph Records, which specializes in heavy-metal and punk bands like Rancid and Offspring. The notoriously hard-living president of the label, Brett Gurewitz, was exactly the kind of rock-and-roll father figure that Johnson has always been drawn to (both Palmer and Tigrett filled that role, too)—a grownup bad boy whose Dionysian streak is tempered with an Apollonian business instinct. When Johnson met Gurewitz, at his office in Los Angeles, the label president said, "Let me ask you an important question." Johnson braced himself. "If the Terminator and the Incredible Hulk got into a fight, who would win?" "The Terminator," Johnson answered. "You're right," Gurewitz said. "We got a deal."

Fat Possum's headquarters is an aluminum-sided single-story ranch house just across the street from the police station, where several of Matthew Johnson's artists have been detained on suspicion of vagrancy. The bland exterior belies the dorm-room chaos within: odd pieces of stereo equipment and car parts are stacked on a table; magazines, CD sleeves, and tools are scattered everywhere. A poster of a gap-toothed, grinning T-Model Ford is tacked to the wall. "I DON'T ALLOW NO MOTHERFUCKING PREACHERS AROUND MY GODDAMN HOUSE," the caption reads. A tidy front office, where Johnson's business partner, Bruce Watson, works, provides a glimmer of order and the suggestion that an actual corporation might be conducting business hereabouts. Watson, a preacher's son with a mop of shiny black curls, dresses with a nerdish, rockabilly flair; he is Johnson's unflappable right-hand man, a self-taught studio wizard who writes the checks, coördinates the calendar, schmoozes the creditors, and generally keeps Fat Possum from collapsing.

A typical day begins at 11 A.M., with a phone call from Mildred Washington, the longtime companion of the late blues artist Junior Kimbrough. The bank says it won't cash Junior's BMI check without Johnson's signature. Fat Possum is currently involved in a dispute with some of Kimbrough's thirty-two known children over Kimbrough's estate; before his death, the musician told Johnson that he wanted to leave everything to Mildred, his companion of more than a decade. Johnson's attempts to carry out Kimbrough's wishes haven't been well received by Kimbrough's children, at least one of whom, according to Johnson, threatened to shoot him. "He just got out of Parchman," Johnson says, "and he said if he ever goes back it will be for killing me."

Kimbrough's place, Junior's—a popular juke joint where farmers and bootleggers mixed with students from the nearby University of Mississippi—burned down in 2000, not long after Kimbrough died. Kimbrough, a big, barrel-chested man with an air of almost regal authority, was one of the most distinctive blues stylists of recent decades, the Fat Possum artist who seemed most likely to succeed. His first album, recorded by Johnson in 1992, was awarded four stars by *Rolling Stone*. Rock bands like U2, Sonic Youth, and the Rolling Stones made pilgrimages to Junior's to hear him play.

The Kimbrough estate is at the heart of another legal mess that keeps Fat Pos-

"All right, so there's been a mistake. Deal with it!"

• •

sum's lawyers trooping in and out of the Greek Revival courthouse in Oxford. In the early eighties, David Evans, a professor of music at the University of Memphis, helped the university sign contracts with Junior Kimbrough and R. L. Burnside: in exchange for a dollar, Evans established a claim to some of their work on behalf of the university. "We want to sue the university," Johnson says. "They sent a tenured professor to sign up these illiterate black guys. It's like some fucking Charles Dickens novel.

"These folklorists want to lock up these blues guys and treat them like rats in a lab," Johnson says of the University of Memphis project. His ultimate goal is to bring the music to "the kids"—those who make up the majority of the record-buying public. "I don't want only records made; I want these guys going to Europe and partying in New York. The last thing I want to be is a folklorist and record records that no one will listen to. There's a million blues records out there now. The world doesn't need any more. You can't just make a blues record today," Johnson says. "It would be like writing a Victorian novel. You have to change or it's dead. Just for the sake of preserving something—it's been preserved. These folklorists are, like, 'Let's record them and take some pictures and maybe the Europeans will buy them.' "

So far, Johnson has been successful at finding a younger audience for his artists. Nevertheless, Junior Kimbrough's death, in 1998, underlines the central flaw in the Fat Possum business model: most of the Mississippi bluesmen whom Johnson has set out to record are ailing senior citizens. They are the last of the Mohicans. "The young black kids in Mississippi are listening to rap and smoking crack," Johnson says. "There may be a few old guys out there I haven't found yet, but I'm beginning to doubt it. It used to be there were fifteen guys in every little town that played. Now you're lucky to find one."

In 1995, I spent three days with Johnson, traversing the Delta in search of new talent. Johnson was also looking for a musician named Asie Payton, who had recorded a demo, then disappeared. At dusk on Saturday, we drove down a dirt road, past a sagging white frame church, and pulled up to a little shack at the edge of a soybean field. Johnson plodded up the dirt path and, after convincing the woman who answered the door that he was neither a bill collector nor a public official, was told that Asie Payton was there but was asleep. When Johnson returned later, Asie Payton was awake, but he couldn't be persuaded to return to a recording studio. Johnson tried again several times. Two years later, Payton was dead.

That night in 1995 was the occasion of a great discovery—for both me and Johnson. After failing to see Asie Payton, we went looking for something to eat. Johnson found a juke joint in a small Delta town in Sunflower County—a crossroads with a boarded-up railroad station and a defunct cotton gin. From the empty street, we could hear the music inside—a wild, hairy racket with a thumping bass drum underneath. Our faces were the only white ones among some twenty Saturday-night revellers. The room was hot and close, bedizened with ratty Christmas decorations and Budweiser signs, a single window fan stirring the smoke inside. There was no stage—the singer and his drummer sat on folding chairs at one end of the small room. The music sounded dirty, literally as well as figuratively (like the blues of Elmore James and J. B. Hutto), as if the guitar strings were rusted and the cones in the Peavey bass amp were cracked. The singer was bragging about kicking his woman in the ass. His playing was raucous and boogie-inflected but strangely upbeat, even when he sang, "Feel so bad, feel like breaking someone's arm." This was T-Model Ford; Johnson signed him up as soon as he had the money.

If hard times and suffering qualify a man to sing the blues, then T-Model Ford can be said to be overqualified. (Even Burnside is in awe of his credentials.) When T-Model Ford was eleven, his father beat him so severely that he lost a testicle. By then, he was working in the fields every day, plowing behind a mule. He married when he was seventeen, and came home one day to discover his father in bed with his wife. His second wife died after drinking poison. At eighteen, he stabbed a man to death and went to prison. (Working on the chain gang, he says, was an improvement on his home life.) One of his sons—he reckons he has twenty-six—sucker punched him and broke his eardrum.

"A cheerful psychopath" is how Johnson describes T-Model Ford, but "an indomitable force." Johnson recalls how Ford once drove from Greenville, Mississippi, to Detroit for a gig, stopping constantly to ask for directions. (He can't read.) Recently, he spent twenty-four hours waiting patiently at the Seattle airport, after failing to recognize his name on the sign held up by his blues-festival escort.

Matthew Johnson and Bruce Watson are on one of their regular visits to see T-Model Ford—he's another one who never answers his phone—and I've joined them. Like many of the Fat Possum artists, T-Model lives in the Mississippi Yazoo Delta. It's early summer, and the fields are brown, lightly dusted with the green fuzz of cotton shoots, and the vista stretches for miles; the landscape is almost featureless, except for the occasional piece of farm machinery, a stand of trees, or a cluster of shotgun shacks. The two-lane highway is so flat that you have the illusion of driving uphill to meet the receding horizon. Now and again, you pass a series of catfish ponds the size of football fields; aquaculture is a relatively recent local attempt to diversify the monoculture of cotton. The stately, columned plantation houses of the antebellum South were never features of the Delta landscape; much of the land was still forested at the time of the Civil War, and planters established their families in the hill towns to the east, where the heat and disease were less noxious. "You can be lonelier here than anyplace in the world," Johnson says, and most statistics prove that you can also be poorer, less healthy, less educated, and less white here than almost anywhere else in America.

"Why don't we stop in and see Johnny?" Watson says. Johnny is Johnny Farmer, a retired bulldozer operator who reluctantly recorded an album for Fat Possum in 1998 and has been almost completely incommunicado ever since. Farmer hasn't been cashing his royalty checks, and Watson is afraid that he may have died.

"I want to talk to T-Model first," Johnson says. "He's been saying he's going to get a Greenville lawyer and take Fat Possum down. He says we're making millions off him."

Greenville is the unofficial capital of the Delta. It appears first as a series of signs rising above the cotton fields on Highway 82: Wal-Mart, John Deere, Taco Bell, Baskin-Robbins, Stogie Shoppe, Pawn Shop—Need Money Stop Here! It is a town of some forty thousand people on the Mississippi River, invisible behind the long ridge of the levee. Beyond it are the offshore casinos to which locals have been turning for economic salvation, and which—along with the recent escalation of crack-related violence—have killed off many of the bars and juke joints in Greenville and the neighboring towns. (More than a decade after it ravaged Northern cities, crack has replaced moonshine as the mainstay of the Delta's underground economy.) We finally locate T-Model's new house, a tidy little prewar Cape Cod set on a tree-lined residential street. Mature oaks shade the yard. His home for the past decade was a run-down trailer in a dangerous part of town. Johnson and Watson helped him find this place when the roof of the trailer fell in; Fat Possum pays the rent. A sullen black woman of indeterminate age comes to the door. This is Stella, T-Model's muse and consort of many years, who is reputed to go blow for blow with him and who inspired the immortal line "Stella, I'm go' put my shoe in your ass."

T-Model Ford appears at the door with a cane. Despite his obvious infirmity, he gives an impression of irrepressible vitality—this would be a tough man to kill. Indeed, his twisted body bears the history of many failed attempts. ("I been shot, I been cut, and nobody get me down," he says in one of his songs.)

"How is it?" Johnson says grimly; he's brooding about the threat to get a lawyer.

"I'm like a apple on a tree. I'm hanging."

T-Model hobbles over, opens his mouth, and shows us his new dentures—a fine-looking set of teeth. "Only had five of the old ones left," he says, by way of explanation. Encouraged, he proceeds to demonstrate the viability of some of his other body parts. He pulls up his pant leg and points to the scars on his ankles from the two years he spent on a chain gang. There are several stab wounds. And a gimpy leg, crushed by a logging truck, he says.

"I been to Germany," he says out of the blue. "I like Germany. They treat me nice. They love old T-Model."

T-Model pulls a pint of Jack Daniel's from his pocket and takes a swig.

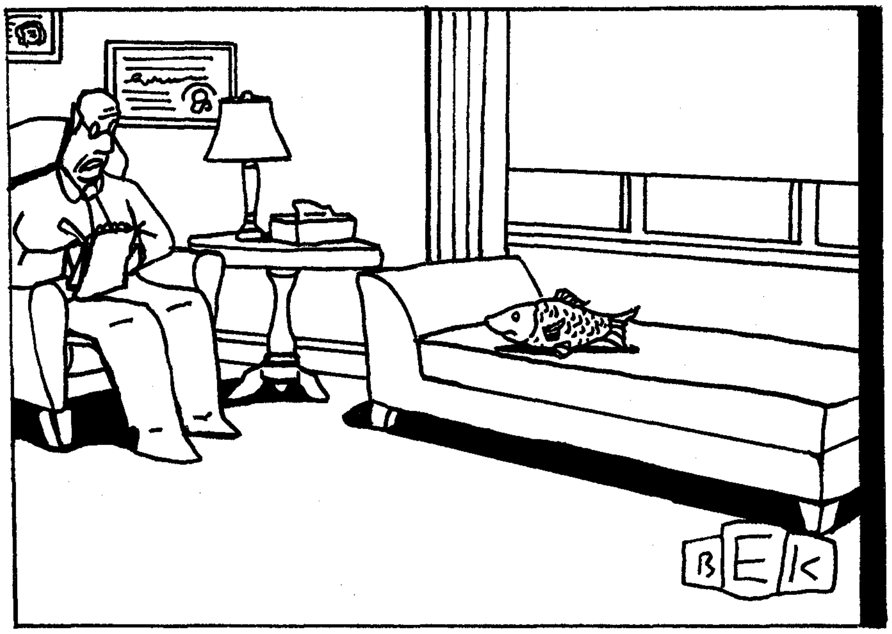
"What's this I hear?" Johnson interrupts. "How you're going to hire some big Greenville lawyer and take Fat Possum down?"

T-Model's ebullience is temporarily punctured. "Why would I be gettin' a lawyer if I didn't know I needed one?"

"What the hell's that supposed to mean?" Johnson says.

Judging his little koan a success, T-Model repeats it with greater conviction. "Why I be gettin' a lawyer if I didn't know I needed one?"

Johnson shakes his head and laughs. You get the idea that this exchange is an exercise in role playing, and Johnson's



"You stink from the head."

role is that of the patriarch—alternately cajoling and berating, doling out money and threatening to withhold it. It's a role that he and his artists, as Mississippians, seem to be comfortable with. (Johnson's politics are leftish by Mississippi standards—he was upset by the recent vote to retain the state flag, with its Confederate-battle-flag motif.) Economic and race relations in Mississippi, like the blues itself, have been shaped by the sharecropping system, under which white plantation owners advanced credit for food and supplies to landless farm laborers. The system is strikingly similar to the music business, especially in its early days, when companies advanced money to artists against their future sales, and then deducted a range of "expenses"—recording, promotion, and overhead. Johnson, you sense, would rather be mistaken for a crook than for a saint, but in the case of, say, T-Model Ford, to whom the label has recently advanced some thirty thousand dollars, he seems to be optimistically openhanded. "A seventy-six-, seventy-seven-year-old guy—I'm going to advance future royalties when he needs a new transmission. Eventually," he says, "the records will earn out.

"I admire my artists," Johnson says, "but I don't expect them to be my friends. Junior Kimbrough once told me that he wouldn't respect me if he didn't think I was ripping him off. Any black man in Mississippi who trusts a white man has got to be on crack."

Johnson mentions to T-Model Ford that we're going to visit Johnny Farmer and asks if he'd like to come along. "Sure, I'll go see ol' Johnny."

As we drive out to Route 1, T-Model talks incessantly, alternating between the first person and the third person, as he relates a series of anecdotes that have no apparent connection. "Can't fight as good as I used to," he says, "but if T-Model gets his hands on him good, then he belongs to me. Been married five times. No more. Best time I had with women is shackin' with 'em. I first got married when I was seventeen, eighteen year old. I hadn't had a woman. My daddy had to tell me how to do it. I got a girlfriend in Sweden. Or maybe Switzerland. I tell you what, these niggers around Greenville, they been lyin' to me all these years when they say white women can't fuck." When Johnson first met T-Model Ford, he was unable to look a white woman in the eye.

Johnny Farmer's trailer is on the edge of a soybean field. A big, eighties-vintage satellite dish full of bulging garbage bags sits near the entrance. Farmer comes to the door—a tall, stooped, light-skinned man with a long, mournful face under a Crown Royal cap. If he's surprised by this visit, he doesn't show it. He returns to his seat on an old plaid couch, chewing tobacco, his eyes moving between his visitors and Burt Lancaster on the television screen, while stroking his knees with his delicate hands, the fingernails like blanched almonds.

"We just wanted to check up on you, make sure you were doing O.K.," Watson says. "It's been a long time. You been playing any?"

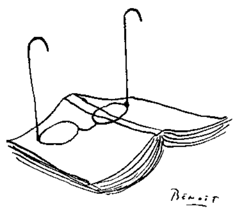
"I joined the church, and I haven't played since."

"I'm a little bit of a Christian myself," T-Model Ford says, in deference to his host's sensibilities.

"You can't do both," Farmer says. "You got to be for Him or against Him."

This is a sentiment one often hears in Mississippi, where roadside churches seem to outnumber grocery stores and Baptist and Methodist congregations are the principal cultural points of reference. Even before Robert Johnson was reputed to have sold his soul to the Devil in exchange for his musical gift, the blues was perceived as the sinful twin of gospel, the Devil's music. Robert Johnson's harrowing "Hellhound on My Trail" is the song of a man who, despite his apostasy, firmly believes in his own damnation. If the blues sometimes seems synonymous with depression or lovesickness or simply feeling "blue," it's also personified as an active and malignant force, an evil spirit taking possession of a man's soul. ("Oh, in my room I bowed down to pray," Son House, one of the founding fathers of the blues, sang in "Preachin' the Blues," in the thirties. "Oh, in my room I bowed down to pray, say the blues come 'long and they drove my spirit away.")

T-Model Ford, meanwhile, continues to shuttle dizzyingly between stories in which he's the victim and those in which he's the villain. But even Johnson's description of T-Model Ford as a cheerful psychopath hardly prepares me for his hair-raising account of how he took one of his wives and several of their children down to the levee and threatened to chop off her head with an axe while the children begged him not to kill her. T-Model Ford smiles, and his eyes positively sparkle as he imitates the falsetto squeals of the children: "Daddy, please don't kill Mommy. Daddy, please. Please, Daddy, please."



There is a stunned silence, until finally Farmer says, "Maybe your daddy didn't beat you right."

T-Model then tells us the story of his daddy. After this recitation of his warped family history, he ends with a bleak poetic image. "I see a stand of cypress trees," he says, and takes a swig from the pint. "And they know they look like the other trees, but they don't know how they got there or who they're related to or anything like that. Sometimes I think that's how it should be with peoples. Maybe it's better you don't know." This is the blues talking, a stark, painful image of alienation.

Back at the office in Water Valley one evening, after several drinks, Johnson attempts to educate me about the Fat Possum mission, grabbing CDs from a bookshelf and jamming them into the player. He wants to trace the history of a certain sound. First, he selects a track from Son House. Johnson listens intently, cocking his head as if he might hear something new this time. "Nobody has that intensity now," he says. "The blues was the rap music of its time. In the twenties, blues was a big seller. Charley Patton was billed as 'the Devil's Stepchild.' Then, after the Depression, nobody wanted it. But when rock and roll came along it was all blues chords. It had the same spirit."

He replaces the CD with one of his own recordings, in which he has paired his bluesmen with contemporary musicians: Johnny Farmer and Organized Noize; Junior Kimbrough and a posse of hip-hop kids from Memphis. "I thought, If this record doesn't sell, at least it will piss off the blues purists." He jams in another CD. The opening riff sounds familiar, but I don't quite know where we are until I hear the voice of

Beck—the ur-slacker. "That's the opening riff of Dr. John's 'I Walk on Guilded Splinters,'" he says excitedly.

He searches the shelves for another CD. "Kurt Cobain really nailed that Leadbelly song. You can't cover blues songs anymore, but Cobain nailed it." Not finding Nirvana, he comes up with Ol' Dirty Bastard, the hip-hop renegade, screaming, "I like it raw."

Johnson is trying to illustrate the evolution of the authentic anarchic howl—from Charley Patton to Eminem. He seems to be looking for the anti-Whitmanesque strain of the American voice—the naysayers, the verbal bomb throwers, the primal screamers. His heroes are the antiheroes: Jerry Lee Lewis, Ike Turner, Keith Richards, Axl Rose, Cobain, Eminem, plus the blue-collar heroes Lynyrd Skynyrd and Kid Rock. Genre be damned—in his mind, these are the true descendants of the lonely, libidinous, and eternally damned Robert Johnson, the true kin of Burnside and Ford.

Johnson is aware that Burnside and company are the last of the genuine bluesmen, and he has been branching out: he signed up a punk duo called 20 Miles and Bob Log III, who plays slide guitar and performs in a motorcycle helmet that has a telephone attached to it. (Johnson assures me that he is huge in Japan.) The truth is that, after years of scamming and fending wolves from the door, Fat Possum seems to be working. Having racked up a million dollars in debt, the operation isn't exactly in the black yet, but last year it broke even on operating expenses for the first time. Fat Possum songs are suddenly the soundtracks of the moment: Burnside's music is on "The Sopranos" and in Michael Mann's bio-pic of Muhammad Ali; Burnside is also on "Big Bad Love," along with T-Model Ford, Junior Kimbrough, and Asie Payton; and there are more than a half-dozen Fat Possum songs in the upcoming "The Badge." Buddy Guy, a classic Chicago "urban" blues artist, covers seven Fat Possum songs on his recent album, "Sweet Tea," and Mandy Stein, the daughter of the A. & R. legend Seymour Stein, is just finishing a full-length documentary on the label. These days, Johnson's checks are clearing. He still refuses to drink name-brand vodka, but he's no longer shutting down the bars in Oxford every night. At times, he seems to be on the verge of realizing that he has fewer and fewer reasons to be miserable.

WARLORD
SIPRESS

Bowery Ballroom, New York City. Cedell Davis is singing, his squat, toadlike body motionless in his wheelchair, his twisted, crippled left hand clutching a kitchen knife, which he slides up and down the frets of a guitar tuned to some unknown scale, his equally deformed right hand strumming, drenching the audience in murky chords. "I hope I touch her before she gets cold," he moans. Some four hundred people, few of them even a third his age, are bobbing on the dance floor beneath him. Sitting in a folding chair close to the stage is T-Model Ford, who clutches a drink in one hand and with the other frantically beckons a tall, striking redhead, thirty-one-year-old Heather Bennett. While her boyfriend watches suspiciously, she bends down to hear the bluesman. "Damn, ain't you one fine-looking white woman," he shouts.

"I'm not a starstruck person, but I'm blown away to meet him," Bennett says later. "These people, it's so amazing that they're still here."

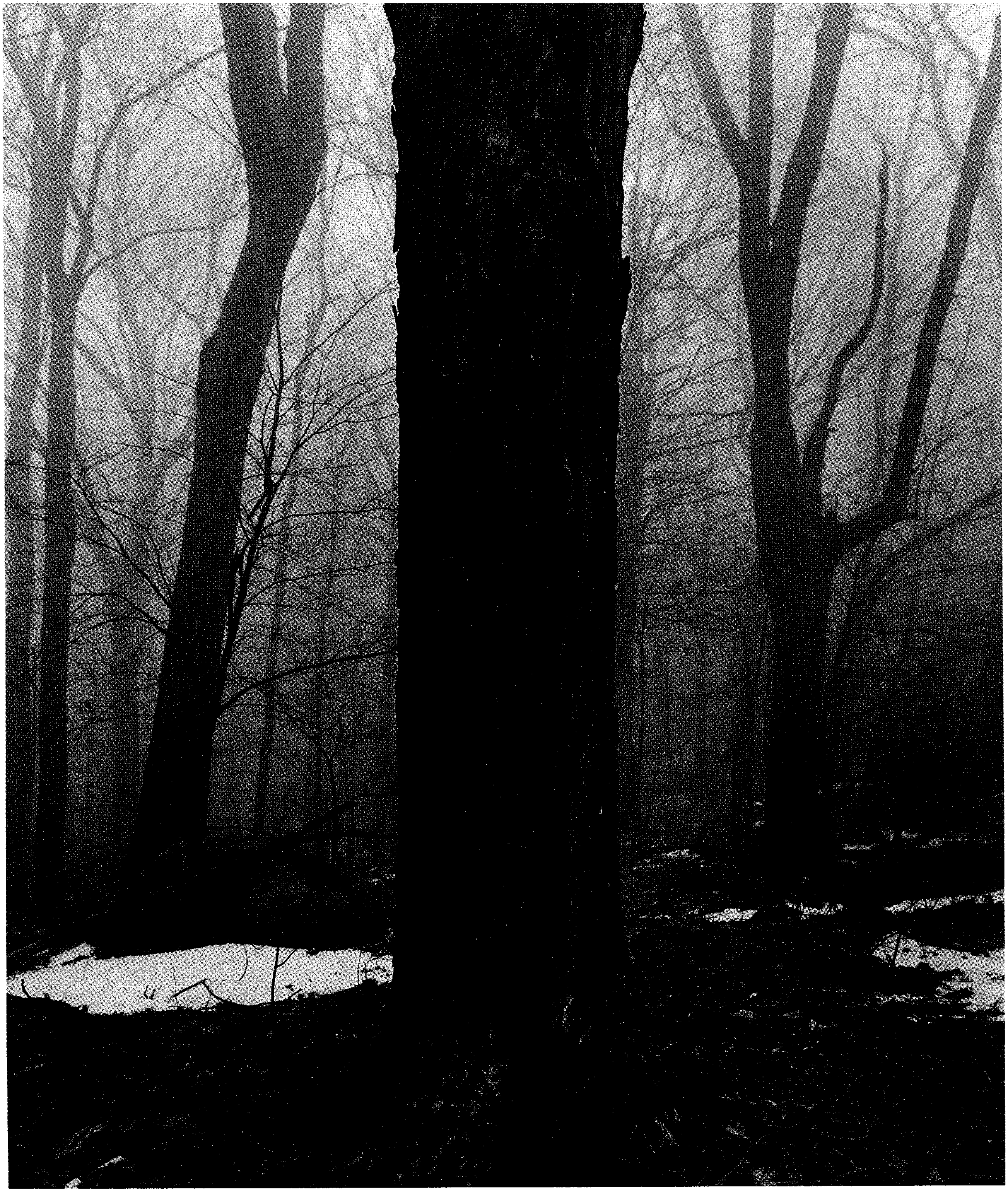
After his set, Davis is wheeled away, and Paul (Wine) Jones takes the stage. "I'm a Mississippi plowboy in New York City," Jones shouts into the mike—although he looks more like a Chicago bluesman, in his black fedora and shiny two-toned red trousers. He's lucky to be here in lower Manhattan, having narrowly escaped incarceration in Iowa after an incident with a coed in a bathroom. (A little later, on the tour bus, T-Model Ford tried to stab him.) As Jones kicks off his set, Cedell Davis accepts a beer from a fan, balancing the cup on the flat of his shaking palm as he lifts it to his lips. A Swedish journalist crouches down and quizzes him about his musical roots, writing his answers on a notepad on her knee. A clean-cut young man in a white polo shirt approaches me as I hand Davis a second beer. "Excuse me," he says. "Are you who I think you are?" He pauses, almost trembling. "Are you . . . Matthew Johnson?" He seems so disappointed by my reply that I feel obliged to tell him that I'm a friend of Matthew's. He introduces himself as Tom Placke, an aspiring filmmaker. "This music," he says, gesturing toward the stage. "It tugs your heart right out of your chest. I got 'Ass Pocket of Whiskey' when it came out, and I've been getting every Fat Possum record ever since. The music is like nothing else that's out there. This is all I listen to. You know the motto, 'We're Trying Our Best'?" he asks. "Well," he says, apparently unable to give up the idea that I may be Matthew Johnson, "you're doing a great job."

Paul Jones dedicates his last song to John Lee Hooker, who died the night before. The audience cheers and claps in homage to the late, great bluesman, while T-Model Ford, Hooker's contemporary, waves to a blonde dressed in a baby-blue halter top. "Come on over and talk to old T-Model," he shouts. "Forget about them other guys. I'm the original hoochie-coochie man." ♦

FICTION

A BOY IN THE FOREST

BY EDNA O'BRIEN



The *Kinderschreck*. That's what the German man called him when he stole the gun and was caught and had to be banished. Before that he was Michan, after a saint, and then Mich, his mother's pet, and after that, when he went to the place, he was Boy, and then Child, when Father Damien had him helping with the flowers and the cruets in the sacristy, and then later still he was K, short for O'Kane, when his hoodlum times began.

He was ten when he took the gun. He took it so as not to feel afraid. It was his first feel of a gun, his first whiff of power. It felt heavy. When he stood it up, it was taller than himself. He did not know if he would have the guts to fire it. His hands shook when he loaded it, yet he loaded it with a knowledge he did not know he had. Then he cuddled it and gave it a name, he called it Rod. *I didn't mean to kill anyone, only to frighten one man.* He wanted to say that, but he was not able to say it, because they were beating him and shouting at him and dragging him off. There was his father, a guard, the sergeant, and Joe Mangan, the bad man who threw the shovel at him and blamed him for cycling over his wet concrete and destroying it. It was not Mich that cycled over it, it was Joe Mangan's own son Paud, but they blamed him. No matter what was done wrong, they blamed him, and there was no one to stand up for him, because his mother was gone. They said she was dead, but she wasn't; they buried her alive, suffocated her. They brought him up flights of stone stairs and into a cold room to show her lying on a slab with no color in her cheeks and no breath. It was snowing outside. It was the snow that made her white and made the world white. She was not dead. They only told him that so as to trick him, because he was her pet. They were jealous, they were. He stole out of his father's house at night and went across the fields to the grave at the edge of the lake and talked to her, and she talked back. He scraped the earth away and made a hole where she could hear. She promised to come back and save him when she was less tired. His plan was that he would run away, away from his father and everyone else, and live in the forest and eat nuts and berries, and in the winter go from house to house to beg for food. He would give himself a secret name, Coillte, the name of the forest.

The first time he spent a night in the woods he was dead scared and dead excited. There were spots before his eyes and shimmers, different colors. He got on his hands and knees and broke sticks, building a sentence around the secret babbly words: "God hates me, Father hates me, I am hated." That night he saw things no one else saw, not Joe Mangan's sons, not anybody's sons, only him. He climbed into a tree and hid. A fox, a she-fox, let out a sound that scared him. It was like a woman having her throat slit, only worse. The vixen was calling for her mate. She was in a bad way, and so were the pheasants that were letting out cluck-cluck sounds to warn each other of the danger. He heard a badger barking and he ducked well into the branches because he knew a man who had been bit by a badger and the man said it was worse than any dog bite. A princess floated by, flying. She was wearing a long white coat and had very long hair down to her ankles. She was carrying slippers. His mother was still in the house, his father attacking her with a poker. She shouted at him to run out, to run off to the woods, and she stayed behind to take the blows. He'd got one blow. At the side of his mouth there was blood that had run down from his ear, and he put a fob of a pine branch on it to stop it. The thing was to keep awake, no matter what. There were noises and there was silence. The louder the silence, the scarier the noise to come. A cock pheasant was warning all other pheasants of an imminent attack. There was a full moon and it was walking across the sky, and in places the light spilt onto the ground, where there were no trees. That was called a glade. He knew that from school.

When his mother came he was fast asleep. Mich Mich Mich. He wouldn't let on that he heard her and wouldn't let on when he came awake. She lifted him down and tweaked his nose and said, "Sleepyhead, sleepyhead." One of her front teeth was gone and she didn't look nearly as nice. He put his finger into the hole and felt the damp of the blood and tasted it and it was warm. His mother and he were not two people, only one.

"I saw a beautiful lady."

"Go on."

"She was on her way to her wedding."

"How do you know?"

"She had silver slippers."

His mother carried him back home through the scrub, and the moon was a lamp to show the way. She said he was a brave boy to stay all alone in the forest and not scream like that silly vixen. She said he was a true son of the forest. Next day he wrote that in the front of his copybook at school: *I am a true son of the forest.*

His father and the guard and the sergeant and his sister Aileen and Joe Mangan and Mrs. Joe Mangan are all in the court, and the judge is sitting at a big brown desk, higher up. The sergeant is telling the judge the terrible thing the wicked boy has done. The German man is on the other side, nodding. His sister Aileen is beside him, holding his hand. His nose is streaming and his eyes, and he has no hankie. The sergeant is describing how the boy stole a bicycle from the doctor's shed, then rode it on purpose over the wet cement that Joe Mangan had just put down, and then rode and got the groceries for his sister and left them on the windowsill and ran off. The sergeant got very wound up when he came to the bit about the boy breaking into the German man's house, finding the shotgun and the belt of cartridges, and then creeping back toward his own house, hiding in a ditch at the end of the garden and waiting for the opportunity to shoot. The sergeant told how he himself and the boy's father were behind the very door that had been shot at and were lucky to still be alive. There was more and more about the boy's aggressive behavior from a young age, from the innocence of stealing apples to the non-innocence, the evil, the knowing evil of stealing a gun. The boy was listening to it all, but he was not allowed to speak. He had not cycled over wet cement, Joe Mangan's son Paud did that, but he got the blame, and they called him dirty names at the time and told him they would carry him off to the Shannon and drown him, and he'd never be found. He ran to his own house to tell his sister, but she wouldn't let him in because she had a friend of hers over and she was ashamed of

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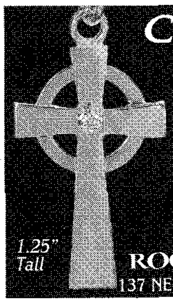

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him. When he asked for a glass of orange, she poured it and put it out on the windowsill and told him to drink it there. That was when he ran away, because no one wanted him.

When the judge gave the sentence, his voice very low and his face very red, the boy didn't understand it. A detention center. What did that mean? The sergeant thanked the judge and they trooped out. His sister told him outside the court that he was going to be going away to St. Malachy's and it was lucky that there was a vacancy and it was a very nice place. It had a swimming pool, just like a holiday camp. He would be let home at Christmas and he could write letters, so he mustn't cry. "I didn't mean to kill anyone, only to frighten one man," he said. She told him to shush it or they'd murder him for thinking such a thing, and anyhow they had to hurry home to start washing and ironing and packing his things. She borrowed a suitcase from Mrs. Joe Mangan.

When they arrived at St. Malachy's he clung to his granny's knee. The car drove past iron gates into a yard with big high walls. The sergeant sat in front and he in the back, refusing to get out, because the place was not a holiday camp but a big dark creepy castle. His granny kept telling him to be a good boy and do as the guard said and walk in there like a man. The sergeant passed him over to Brother Finbar, and Brother Finbar took him in and shut the door and bolted it. Brother Finbar had a long brown robe and a strand of rosary beads that swung like rope. They walked fast, with Brother Finbar telling him they would put manners into him. He was brought to a cloakroom to be fitted with clothes. He and Brother Finbar fought over his jumper, the one his mother had knit for him when she was sick in the hospital. It was purple and red, with navy cuffs and a multicolored tassel at the end of a zip. It smelled of his mother, and when he wore it he could feel her soft hands and her kiss. He would not part with it. He would not raise his arms to have it pulled off. Brother Finbar dragged and dragged, then found a loose thread in the waistband and started ripping it. He could see the colors breaking up, navy blue and purple and red; it was like his mother was being ripped up, and the threads were in wormy coils on the flagged floor. He was fitted with short pants, a jacket three times too big for him, and nailed boots. "You will wear our clothing whilst here," Brother Finbar kept repeating. Whilst here. Whilst here. Whilst here.

Out in the yard there were boys cuffing and roughing each other. He stood apart, with a group studying him, making a ring around him. Where's he from? Ask him. Ask 'im. Down the country. Where's that? Where's down the country? Ha. Ha. Ha. A bogger. Has he got a cigarette? Hey, Rambo, got a fag? He doesn't smoke. Eejit. Bogger. Give him a hook. Test his mettle. Show your mettle, bogger. Clinging to his mammy's knee.

By the time the bell went, they had him down on the ground, kicking him, until a boy called Bertie pulled them off. The tea was in mugs and the thick slices of bread were streaked with lard. Brother Finbar stood at the head of the table as if he were an iron figure with iron rosary beads and an iron beard.

"Eat your tea, boy."

"I'm not hungry."

"The boot is on the other foot now. There's no guns here to scare people."

For two weeks he was assessed, to find which wing he should be kept in. The woman that assessed him sat him at a table and asked him questions, asked him if he had three wishes what they would be. He said he wanted to go home. Other boys told him to scupper the notion. In the end it was decided he should go to the Castle. It had very stiff rules and a cabbagy smell. The first evening he was shaking and he couldn't swallow. A young brother called Anthony took pity on him.

"I have stomach cramps," he told the young brother.

"Drink a drop of hot tea, 'twill help you," the brother said. He was a nice brother and one side of his face was a raw red and he said that was called a strawberry face. He took different pieces of cutlery to draw a map of the country, and then he put the sugar bowl down to show where he came from, a scenic place with mountains and a famous lake. He missed it. He said he was very young when he joined the order, but they were

THE SAILBOAT POND

The equinox reverses its effects,
The west wind has finished flattening
In its storm the sailboats, hired for thirteen francs,
That raced the ducks, some young
Sparrows come back to dig their dust pits
In the sand beneath the bench, they leave
A feather there sometimes. Harassment
Is a crime, a girl says to a boy
Wearing no socks. A middle-aged pair
Resume embracing in front of the sentry
And the tulips. The woman is a bit
Short-legged; the man declares
That buying books will soon become a clear
Sign of derangement, yes, insanity.

—*Hédi Kaddour*

(Translated, from the French, by Marilyn Hacker.)

a family of fourteen and with his face and everything there were no other chances for him.

"How long will I be here?"

"Years."

Then Brother Anthony said he had something for him. The boy thought it was a slice of cake, but it wasn't. It was a prayer that Brother Anthony had copied and that he read out: "Jesus said to them, 'When you make the two one and when you make the inner as the outer and the outer as the inner, you shall enter the Kingdom.'"

"A child and his mother are one."

"Ah, yes . . . but that's secular and I am talking of being with God."

"Will I not be going home for Christmas?"

"It's not for me to say. Who's at home?"

"My sister and my pet fox . . . I didn't get to say goodbye to it."

"No use crying over these things."

The rain was sliding down the window and plopping onto the flat roof.

He tried. He tried to keep awake so as not to wet the bed, but he always fell asleep and he always wet the bed, and he wakened to the smell of ugly wet and Brother Jude putting his hand in under the blanket and dragging him out by his mickey. You dirty thing, you dirty thing, you. Brother Jude brought him to a room off the dormitory. The strap was kept in a refrigerator there so it would stay cold and hard. It was leather, with studs down both sides of it. He was beaten on both cheeks of his bottom and on his legs and on his arms, but not on his face. He was punched on his face. When he got back to the dormitory, boys came around his bed to know what had happened, asking if Jude did any bit of fly-fishing or fiddled with his yoke. Lazlo led the interrogation. Lazlo was the leader and they were all afraid of him because he was a schizophrenic. Schizophrenic meant that he heard voices and he would attack any boy if the voices told him to. Lazlo said that Jude was a wiggledy-wiggledy wanker. Lazlo trained boys to be tough. He took them into the lavatory and made cuts on their wrists with a flick knife so they'd get used to the pain. The flick knife had a wooden handle with a picture of a Labrador on it.

In the morning he got another beating, from the prefect, on account of the plastic sheet being wet and smelly. That beating was with the back of a lavatory brush. At Christmas his granny would come for him and he would never have to come back. In the letters to his granny he had to say that he was a good boy and learning his lessons and getting a star for his subjects. The brothers made them say that. He would not tell her about the beat-

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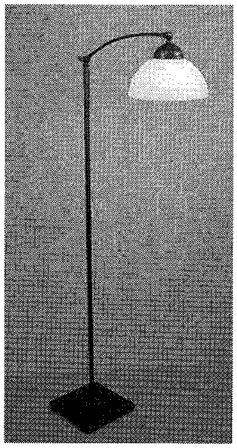

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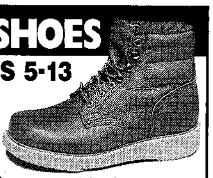


ings when she came to fetch him in the car, he would tell her at night, when she tucked him up in bed.

A psychiatrist saw him twice a week and asked him what he was afraid of. He said that he was afraid his grandmother would die, because he had dreamt it. He had dreamt that his mother would die, and she did. He didn't say that he was afraid of Brother Jude or Lazlo, because that would get him into a big mess. He was given the same three pretend wishes. He wished that his mother hadn't died and that he could go home and that he would never use a gun again. Other times he wouldn't talk at all. Out in the fields he and other boys worked digging potatoes or pitting potatoes, and he ate them raw to show how tough he was.

One morning, it was a priest who rang the bell for breakfast. Father Damien. Boys said that Brother Jude had gone crackers, had gone into the fields and stripped himself naked and run off. His brown habit was found in the field and his beads and his sandals.

Father Damien was home from Africa and had a tan from all the sunshine. He was not cross over the wet bed and called him child—“What is it, child, what is it, child?” Father Damien gave him a toffee. It was a white toffee with ground nuts in it. Lazlo and the other boys made fun of him. “Lick arse” they called him, for playing up to the priest.

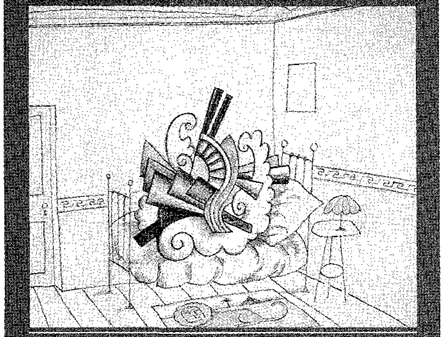
Father Damien told him one day that he was a lucky boy, he was going to be allowed to help in the sacristy. He would fill the glass cruets with wine and with water and get the vases ready for the flowers. They were the first flowers he had smelled in months. They were white with bits of yellow, the color of egg yolk, and they grew wild. At home they were called bog lilies.

One evening after Benediction they were in the sacristy and Father Damien was wearing a white garment, like a gown, with big pockets in it. “Put your hand in my pocket, child.” There was a sweet in the pocket. Father Damien told him to keep his hand there until he was told not to. He felt the swellings, his own and the father's, and his cheeks got very red and he was hot and damp between his legs and Father Damien clung to him until he was finished. Then he said, “Good child, good child,” and warned him not to tell.

Davey was his new friend. Davey was older, but not like Lazlo. Davey was fourteen, nearly fifteen. He ran the disco. They had discos one Saturday a month, and Davey danced with the best-looking girls, “motts” he called them, and he steered them down to the back of the hall, where it was dark. The girls were delinquents like them, they came in a bus from a convent ten miles away, and two nuns stood up on the platform next to the record-player to keep an eye on what went on. They couldn't see into the back of the hall where Davey and the big boys were lifting up girls' jumpers and blouses. Mich danced with the small girls who knew the steps better than he did. Davey went in for the slow dancing and said he went through the girls like butter. “This is me new mott,” he'd say of whatever girl he was dancing with. Once Davey had kissed a girl, it was on to the next, because the more girls a lad had the greater his status, Davey said. “Status” was a new word. The other thing Davey said was to drop a girl like a hotcake once she showed interest, got clingy. Hotcakes and hot crumpets were two different things, all part of a girl's pussy.

The night of the Halloween dance Mich got his first drink, cider. A lot of the boys were dead drunk and gassing outside in the yard. Two boys broke into a factory not far from the school and siphoned cider from vats into lemonade bottles. It tasted of apples. Davey called him aside; he had a plan and it was thus: Every Saturday there were games on the grounds, hurley and football and handball, priests and brothers and boys, all running in all directions, pandemonium. Young Mich would go into the chapel the next Saturday and open the back door that led out onto a field and down to the river.

He wouldn't be playing hurley that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—*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

RANDOM HOUSE

particular day because he would have a nosebleed. Davey would pay a rough jackeen with a cigarette to give Mich a few punches, dead easy. Davey said that they would probably find a boat or a canoe down by the river, and they would drift for miles until they came to the city. Then they could be stowaways on a ship or go into town, whichever. He seemed to favor the town on account of having mates there. He said it was brilliant crashing a car, either doing it alone or with a crowd; it gave a great buzz. Best of all was doing it with girls, because they lost their marbles on account of having such a big fright.

That day, Mich left the games field with a handkerchief to his nose and went into the chapel. No one paid any attention to him. He unbolted the back door and then hid in the confessional box until Davey came. Once out the door, they ran helter-skelter, down the fields to the river and along the river and over gates and fences and across fields, all the time hoping there'd be a boat moored at the next bend or the next, but there wasn't. He was proud of how fast he ran in the nailed boots. By the time it was dark they had come to an estate with a whole lot of houses and ponies in a paddock. There was a bonfire with kids around it. Davey said that they'd best chat up the kids. They were smoking and having a singsong. They were enjoying themselves, and then a boy said, "Jesus. Look." A car was coming into the field, the headlights full on. It was the white van from the Castle. The head brother and two other brothers and Lazlo and a boy jumped out. Mich ran to the river and jumped in, clothes and all, and he could feel the current pulling him along and he was happy because he was going to drown and he would never be going back to the Castle again. The boy that caught him was Lazlo, who held him under the water until he nearly drowned, then brought him up and shook the water off him. Then he put him down again and held him, and Mich was smothering and his head and his brain were all water, and Lazlo wouldn't let him up until he nearly died. "Lick arse, lick arse."

He was put in solitary and had to write down how bad he was. He had to write it hundreds of times. Christmas would be soon, but he would not be going home. He didn't cry much anymore. He stoppered the tears up, like putting a cork in a bottle. It got that it was just as bad waiting for the beatings as suffering them. He never knew when they were coming for him. He was due a hundred lashes. He cried only when it came to Christmas, because he was not let home. Most of the boys were allowed to go, even Lazlo. His sister sent him a card with silver salt on it and he licked it and it tasted gritty. She said the family hoped he was well and that they missed him. They had been told about his running away and his aggressive behavior, and they were all praying that he would turn over a new leaf. She put kisses at the end. He cried at Midnight Mass because of the singing on tape. It was like hearing his mother singing in the kitchen long ago. Father Damien called him aside after Mass and asked him what he would like for Christmas. He said he would like a guitar. Father Damien gave him a teeny box of chocolates and a holy picture. He ate the chocolates on a garden seat and wondered if it would snow. The plants were all lying down, as if someone had beaten them and they had no strength to get up.

He was put to work with some other boys in the potato fields after school. Lazlo was in charge. When they'd finished, they told him that they had some business with him, and they went to the opposite end of the field, away from the school, where there was an old plow with a car cushion on it. They said they knew what he'd done with Father Damien and they were going to cut it off. He screamed and held on to it and begged, and Lazlo said, "O.K., O.K., off with a caution." They put him face down on the cushion and pulled his overalls off and they took turns. He could hardly walk back because he was so sore. And he was bleeding.

He dreamt about running away, because if he dreamt it, it would happen. Himself and another boy were sent to the top gate every other morning to collect the milk. One morning, the other boy was sick, so he went down alone. The routine was always the same: the driver took the full crates out of the truck and loaded the empty ones, and set off for the next stop. When Mich was found in the next big town, the driver said, "Holy heck." Mich insisted to the driver that he'd been kept prisoner at the Castle, and that his grandmother and

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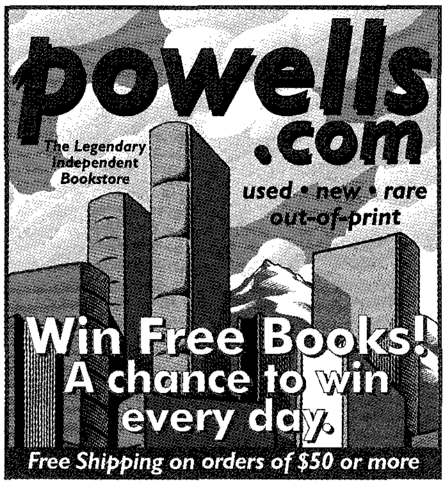
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himself had made a pact that he would run away when the opportunity came up. The driver didn't believe him, but he knew the bastards they were, so he let him go. Mich ran toward home, but he was not going home.

Three nights later, soaked and scared, he was back in his village and knocking on the door of a man he knew. The man was astonished, but he let him in and they dried him and gave him hot cocoa, and the boy slept in a room with two of their sons, who were afraid of him. He knew they were afraid, because when one went to the toilet the other went as well, so as not to be alone with him. The man had gone to the guards, because there was a warrant out for him to be sent back to the place he ran away from. He got a reprieve for seven days. Then he got sick, and the doctor came, and he was going to be allowed fourteen days' reprieve in all. He helped the man bring in the cows and do odd jobs in the fields.

One evening, the man was milking the cows and he stood beside him in the cow house and told him the things that happened to him in the place, and the man asked him several times if it was true. "God's honor," he said, and the man hugged him and stopped milking and the dribbles of milk went all over the floor. The man said he would talk to his wife and that they would take it up with the authorities. They had their dinner in the evening and the woman ladled out meat and vegetables into soup plates. They had apple cake or jelly after. Then the man opened the door and his pet rabbits came out of their hutch and into the kitchen. The favorite, Dustin, climbed onto the man's shoulder and nibbled at his ears. The others perched on the tiled curb around the fire. Everyone laughed. Mich laughed, too. This was home, a dinner, apple cake, a calendar on the wall, and a record put on for the rabbits to waltz to. In bed, the sons tried to get him to talk about the Castle, but he wouldn't. He knew things that they didn't know. Then one night he boasted about getting a blade and slitting his wrist and being in the ambulance, and the twenty stitches he had. He told them how he bit the stitches and spat the thread out. He told them he was a head case and that Lazlo and the gang were scared to death of him. They knew he had been sent away for trying to shoot his father and the sergeant, everyone knew it. There was a hole in the panel of the door for proof.

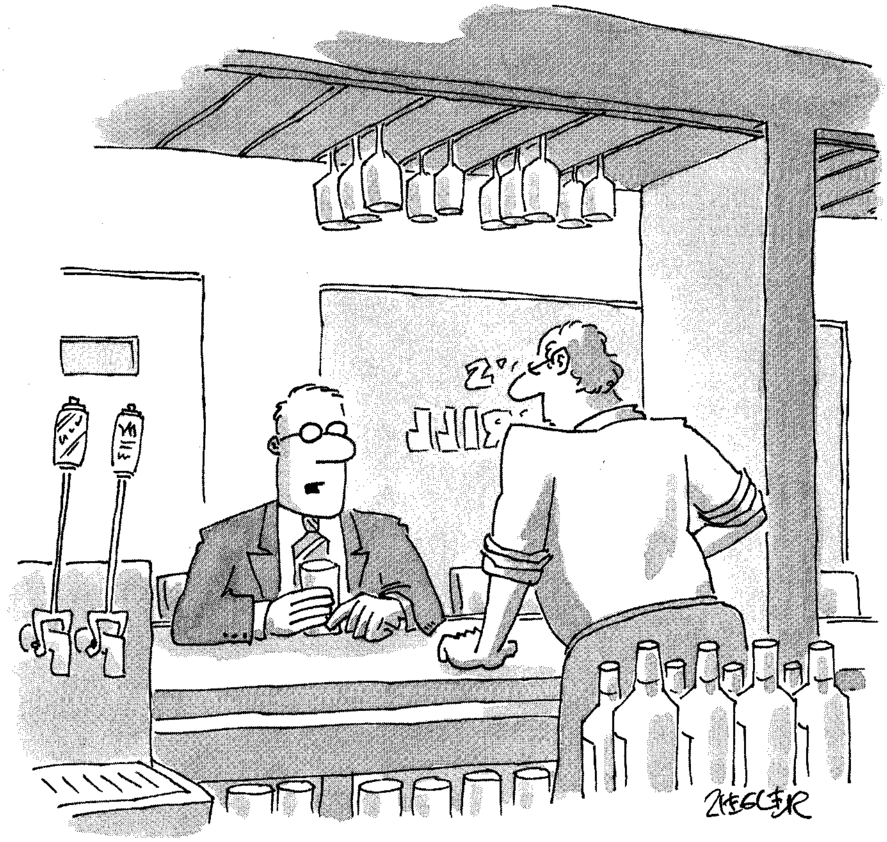
One day after planting cabbages the man sat him down on a wooden seat in the front garden to have a talk with him. He thought it was about going back, but it wasn't. The man asked him if he would like to be part of their family, one of them, a son. He said he didn't know.

The man said it would take time, that he would have to go through all the correct channels, but he felt confident of the outcome. Mich's father had given the permission and his sister had gone away to live with her granny. The man asked him if he'd like a different name and he said he would, he would like to be called Coillte, the name of the forest.

It was about a month later that he began to hate the rabbits and the attention they got, the fussing over them, the click-cluck and the oats put down on the kitchen floor for their supper. He hated other things, too—the sons, pretending he was their brother when he wasn't. He knew the movement of the rabbits, the time of evening they came out and frisked around the field and nibbled at grass, the same time as when the crows cawed. He went out to the field a while earlier and took some oats in a bit of cardboard and funnelled them out in little heaps. Several rabbits came to him, but there was one in particular that he decided he would like to kill. A namby-pamby. A weakling. He struck the shovel down on the nape of its furry neck and it fell sideways like a glove. Next morning the dog brought the carcass and flung it on the step. No one said anything.

It was only after he killed the kittens that there was trouble. There were six kittens in all, cleaved together in their sleep, so it was easy except for the squeal that came out of them and the blood. But one of the sons saw him and ran into the house yelling and the mother came out and blessed herself and asked him why in the name of God the boy had done such a wicked thing. He said it wasn't him that did it, it was someone else, a boy that came on a motorbike and then tore off.

The father broke the news to him in the dining room that night. There was



"I'm adding an extra hour of booze time here, Al, as a heightened security measure."

the father and him and a big jug of artificial flowers. The father held up the documents about the adoption and said it would have to wait. Mich would have to go away for a while, because his head was all scrambled up. He got on the floor and clung to the man's trousers, but the man said it was out of his hands now, it was in the hands of the state and the social workers and the people experienced in these matters.

They drove to another place, where the local doctor had made arrangements for him to go. A secretary took down the particulars and signed him in. The man told him to shake hands with her and say thank you, and he did.

"We've been trying to get him to eat for days, but he wouldn't . . . He's very weak," the man said.

"We can't have that," she said, and went off to see what she could raid from the kitchen.

While she was gone, a head doctor with a red puffy face came and looked in, and the man handed him a sealed letter.

"Hang on, hang on . . . we might have a problem here," the doctor said, and went off to make a phone call. He came back and said that they couldn't keep the boy, but that there was a place for young offenders about twenty miles away and he would be placed there.

"Can you make an exception?" the man asked him.

"I can't—he's underage. Someone got their knickers in a twist," he kept saying.

"So what do we do?" the man's wife pleaded.

"St. Sebastian's . . . that's the place for young offenders, and it's not far. The only snag is his father will have to meet you there to sign the admission forms."

"His father won't," the man said.

"I'll go and phone him and make sure that he does. He'll be there to meet ye. I'll tell him exactly where it is." He went off to telephone his father and came back telling them to drive nice and slow but to keep an eye out for a big white notice board that said "St. Sebastian's," two miles this side of the town.

They drove—the man, his wife, and himself—without saying much, and when the town lights winked, the man started asking the way. One person said, "Straight on," and the next person said, "You've passed it." The man had to get out and make a phone call. The woman asked him was he cold, and he said no. Then she asked was he sorry for the thing he'd done wrong, and he said yes. Yes.

At St. Sebastian's, two nurses saw him. One took his pulse and another put a stethoscope on his heart because he was shaking and twitching. Then one of them asked him why he had killed the kittens. He said, "I forget." The other asked him why he had run away from the Castle. He said he hated it. The nurse said hate was not a good emotion, especially in a growing boy.

His father had not arrived, so they sat in the outer hall and waited and waited, but he never came. Two more phone calls were made, and then a nurse and a doctor came out and had a piece of paper that was a dossier on him. The man and the woman stood with them, and he was standing nearby, next to a big green plant, and he could hear what they were saying. The doctor was telling the woman that it was not advisable to have him around other children.

"Why not? . . . Why not?" she kept asking. He held up the dossier again and showed it to the husband and the husband said "Jesus" and said he would rather not show it to his wife. The doctor insisted. He held up the piece of paper for the woman to see, and when she saw it she gasped, then read it out loud: "This boy could kill."

The man and his wife shook their heads at each other, and then the man came across to him and said that there was no room at the inn and that they would be taking him back to the Castle.

"Don't send me back, don't send me back." He got down on his knees and shouted it to strangers sitting in armchairs. It was visiting Sunday. A woman came forward with a biscuit and he refused it and shouted louder, louder, "Don't send me back there! . . . I'll do away with myself!"

He said it to himself when they drove through the night in the rain. He thought if he said it often enough his prayer would be answered, but it was not. They drove along dark country roads, where there were hardly any cars, and now and then they came on a dead fox or a dead cat, outstretched, its fur and its guts strewn there, a pitifulness to it, as if there was something that cat or that fox badly needed to say. ◆

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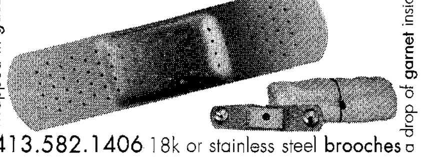

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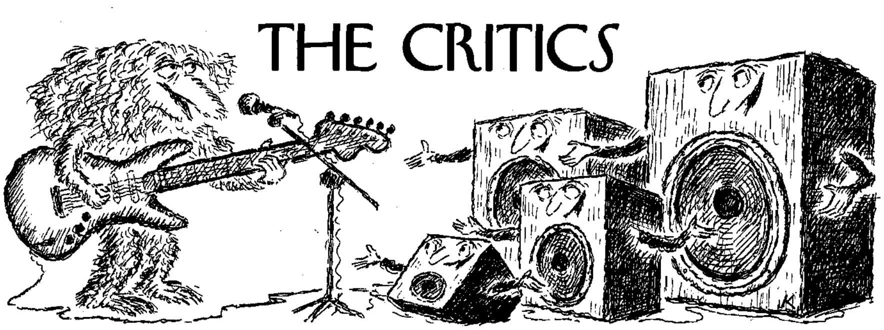


THE ART WORLD

THE SPIDER'S WEB

Louise Bourgeois and her art.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

The sculptor Louise Bourgeois just turned ninety, but she still works six days a week. On Sunday she rests, because that's her assistant's day off. This leaves her at loose ends, however, so for the past thirty years she has held a Sunday salon in her brownstone on West Twentieth Street. The attendees are mostly young artists, who have come to show her their work. Last spring, I went to one of these gatherings. There were fourteen visitors, who sat in hard chairs in a small, peeling parlor. Once we had all signed release forms—to compound everyone's nervousness, the salons are videotaped—Bourgeois materialized in the doorway, a tiny woman in a pink blouse, black culottes, and black sneakers. Her hair was brushed back elegantly, and she wore gold hoop earrings. The art critic Paulo Herkenhoff helped her into a chair behind a table facing us, and from there, atop a wooden box and a pillow, to raise her high enough for us to see her, she presided for the next four and a half hours.

Bourgeois is not a dear old lady. With Herkenhoff's help, she drew each artist into a discussion of what he or she was doing. Usually she made an encouraging comment, but not always. One artist showed her a series of Keith Haring-esque drawings he had made. "But it is silly, faux-naïf," she said. The man tried to explain. Finally, Herkenhoff asked her if she wanted to see more from this portfolio. "No," she answered. "I am through, I am through." People have been known to exit Bourgeois's salon in tears, but if you can take it the dynamics are interesting. The critic Amei Wallach has described a session in which Bourgeois, while modelling a piece of clay, talked about the difference between painting and sculpture:

> When you go from painting to this, it means you have an aggressive thought. You want to twist the neck of a person. . . . I became a sculptor because it allowed me to express—this is terribly, terribly important—it allowed me to express what I was embarrassed to express before.

Then she wrung the neck of the figure she was creating.

Bourgeois is one of the few surviving artists of the early modernist period. By rights she should be thinking about mass or space or something like that. In any case, she should have been spared the violent catharsis, the discharge of terror and wrath, being enacted by female artists today. But this drama is a daily event for her. She has crushing anxiety attacks. "That happens to me four times a day," she has written. And it has been happening for as long as she can remember.

Fear is the main theme of her work, but anger is a close second. "I have fantastic pleasure in breaking everything," she has said. Once, in an interview, she threw a ceramic vase onto the floor and stomped on its fragments. But mostly the violence is in the work. In one celebrated piece, a six-foot marble statue called "She-Fox" (1985), the animal has been decapitated, and there is a big gash in its throat. At the base of the statue, huddling behind the animal's haunches, is a tiny female figure. Bourgeois has explained that the she-fox is her mother and the little supplicant is herself: "I cut her head off. I slit her throat. Still, I expect her to like me."

Bourgeois has not failed to notice that her psychological difficulties may have something to do with her sex. "Women are losers," she has said. "They are beggars, in spite of women's lib." She has protested this fate. Probably her best-known sculpture, because Robert Mapplethorpe photographed her holding it, is "Fillette" (1968), a latex figure of what is unavoidably an erect penis, about two feet long, with a pair of testicles to scale. Bourgeois recalls that when Mapplethorpe asked to photograph her she was afraid; she knew that his work was about men, with big penises. So she brought *her* penis, "Fillette," carrying it jauntily under her arm, like an Hermès handbag. She says she feels kindly toward the male reproductive anatomy, as well she might, since she had three sons. "Fillette" is not a compliment to the male sex, however. Its very size is comical. Furthermore, its surface looks corroded, as if it were rotting.

Bourgeois was born in 1911, her parents' third child, and third daughter. As she has said, this was a problem:

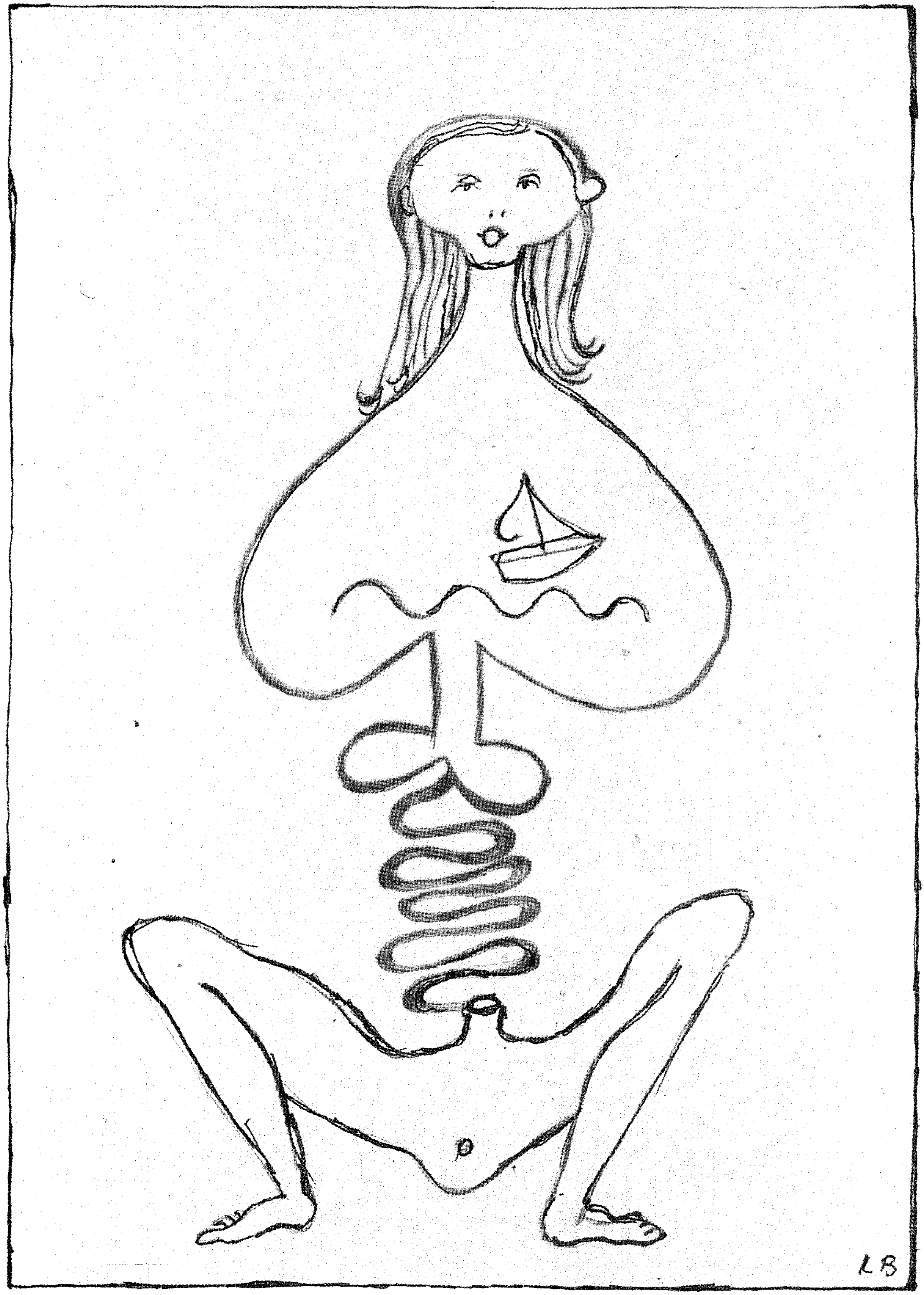
> My mother must have thought, "How am I going to keep my man, presenting him with three girls in succession?" She was not without imagination and she said, "Don't you see, this little girl, we are going to name her for you. [He was Louis.] Do you know that child is your spitting image?" And my father said, "Gee, it is true. She is very pretty and she's just like me." So this is the way I made it, you see, but . . . I was supposed to make myself forgiven for being a girl.

The word her mother used for "little girl" was probably *fillette*. Hence, I believe, the title of Bourgeois's mock-compensatory penis.

Two years after Louise's birth, her mother finally produced a son, but by then Louise was already her father's favorite—which, as she tells it, meant that he dominated her relentlessly, in order to bring her up to snuff. Her feelings about that, or some of them, can be read in a large latex-and-plaster piece, a grisly assemblage of bumps and lumps, together with assorted body parts—chicken legs, lamb shoulders—called "The Destruction of the Father" (1974). Bourgeois has described the fantasy underlying the piece:

> At the dinner table, my father would go on and on, showing off, aggrandizing himself. And the more he showed off, the smaller we felt. Suddenly, there was a terrific tension, and we grabbed him . . . and pulled him onto

COURTESY CHEIM & READ GALLERY



Bourgeois's "Self Portrait" (2001). "Women are losers. They are beggars," she has said, and she has protested this fate.

"I barked at some people today and thought of you."

> the table and pulled his legs and arms apart—dismembered him, right? And we were so successful in beating him up that we ate him up.

She hated him, and she loved him like crazy. When he died, in 1951, she stopped showing any new work for eleven years.

So Bourgeois, this bold modernist sculptor, a contemporary of Henry Moore and David Smith, has all the same female troubles that the women who go on "Oprah" have. Worse, she claims that she became an artist simply in order to cope with such problems. Her art, she has written, is a form of therapy, a way of preventing herself from going out and killing someone, or herself. The audience is "bullshit, unnecessary." Jerry Gorovoy, her assistant of twenty years, confirms this. According to him, on any given morning, "she's not sitting down to make art. She's trying to get through the day, and the art is the by-product." Her art, he says, is "about what went wrong."

What went wrong? Bourgeois's parents were prosperous French artisans, restorers of antique tapestries. Her father travelled, hunting up the old textiles, and ran a gallery in Paris where the family sold them. Bourgeois's mother, with a staff of about twenty-five women, repaired the tapestries. Many collectors were American, so the scenes could not be unchaste. Bourgeois has recalled how her mother "would cut out the genitalia, very delicately, with little scissors, and collect them." (Another source of "Fillette"?) The resulting gaps had to be sewn over, as did the sections of the tapestry that had disintegrated. To redraw missing parts, the firm employed a certain M. Gounod, from the Gobelin works, who came on Saturdays. But sometimes M. Gounod didn't turn up. When Bourgeois was ten, she was put to work to cover for him, and so she learned to draw.

She didn't intend to be an artist. Her passions were mathematics and philosophy. That is what she studied at the Sorbonne, after twelve years at Paris's Lycée Fénelon. Best of all, she liked solid geometry, a field, she has said, "where relations can be anticipated and are eternal." Mathematics, she says, never betrayed you. Eventually, however, she discovered that mathematics offered no certainties either: "You're told that two parallels never meet, and then you learn that in non-Euclidean geometry they can easily come together. I was deeply disappointed, and turned toward the certainties of feeling." That is, she turned to art. She spent her early twenties running from studio to studio in Paris, to study with different teachers. The one she liked best was Léger, who told her that she was a sculptor, not a painter. To pay for her art lessons—her father refused to help—she did various odd jobs. In Léger's studio she earned her way via translation services. Her English was very good, because she and her brother had had an English nanny.

In 1936, she met an American art-history student, Robert Goldwater, and two years later she married him. Not surprisingly—two of her sons are still alive—Bourgeois has said much more about her childhood than about her adulthood, and on the subject of her marriage she has been notably silent. But from her rare, sidelong remarks about Goldwater it seems that she liked him for the same reason that she had liked mathematics: he "was a completely rational person. . . . He did not betray me. He did not betray anyone. I never saw him angry in my life. Ever." Goldwater became an important art historian. He was interested in nothing but ideas, she says, with the result that "each of us remained forever, forever, mysterious to the other." But she told me that she was always grateful to him: "I was a runaway girl, and Robert saved me." (Everything Bourgeois "told me" was said in writing. She rarely gives interviews these days. I was allowed to submit a list of questions—Nabokov's system—and she answered them by E-mail.)

Goldwater moved her to New York, and she loved the city. She missed home, though, and, like a good, guilty female, she felt she had abandoned her family. In her first solo sculpture show, in 1949, she exhibited two rooms full of slim, pole-like figures—some bronze, some wood—one with wings, one with nails driven into it, and so on. She called them "Personages," and they looked like people, whispering to one another across the space of the gallery. Soon after that show, her father died. She went on making uprights, but now they were wild, spiralling things. It was at this time that she dropped from public view, though she did not stop working. Eventually she began using latex and plaster, creating large, gluey-looking objects that resembled mouths or genitals or the interiors they led to. In "Le Regard" ("The Gaze") one peered inside a sort of giant, messy clam and saw, between folds of material, a small, round, wet-looking thing. This is an embarrassing piece. We feel we shouldn't be looking.

In her early work, Bourgeois anticipated much that others would do later: installations, minimalism, body art. She did not get a lot of attention, however. This was partly her fault—at times she seemed to flee attention—but it was also owing to the boys'-club atmosphere of the postwar American art world, the world of the Abstract Expressionists, with their emphasis on virility, "action," abstraction. In comparison, her work, however abstract, seemed narrative, soft.

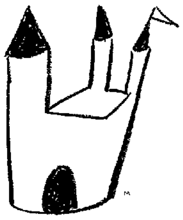
It was only with the challenge to modernism which arose in the sixties and seventies that people started to notice her. Most crucial was the feminist challenge. *Why* did art have to be abstract? the feminists asked. Why wasn't it about the real story, about people's lives and emotions? Like many older female artists, women who had made it in a man's world and were proud of that, Bourgeois had mixed feelings about feminism. Her biographer Robert Storr, a senior curator at the Museum of Modern Art, says that she associates feminism with victimization. Nevertheless, it was the newly energized female critics and curators of the sixties and seventies who, unafraid of rotting penises and peekaboo clams, paid her the respect she had not received before. In 1966, the art critic Lucy Lippard included her in a famous show, "Eccentric Abstraction," that was a harbinger of postmodernism. There she stood, alongside artists such as Bruce Nauman and Eva Hesse, and though she was old enough to be their mother, she looked as young and crazy as they did.

In the late sixties, she went to Italy and began making large marble figures. The work was still abstract, but it was "symbolic abstraction" (her term), and what it symbolized was often clear. Her 1967 "Sleep II," for example, was a great stone totem worthy of the Toltecs. At the same time, it looked a lot like the head of a penis. In 1973, Goldwater died, and, as sometimes happens with women artists when they are widowed, she did not wither; she flowered. "The Destruction of the Father" was made the following year. I have wondered whether it might not have to do with Goldwater as well as with her father.

Now the world caught up with her. She was given cover stories, honorary degrees, commissions for public works. In 1982, at the urging of a young female curator, Deborah Wye, Bourgeois was accorded a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, the first large retrospective that the institution had ever devoted to a woman. At the age of seventy, she became world famous.

On the occasion of the retrospective, Bourgeois did something that has affected her career ever since. Before, no matter how unbuttoned her work, she tended to give reticent interviews. In 1969, when the MOMA curator William Rubin asked her about "Sleep II," she replied, "I am not particularly aware or interested in the erotic of my work, in spite of its supposed presence." To a journalist who dared to ask her about the "Personages," she responded, "Do you want me to talk about my personal life? . . . I don't like to do that."

Then, with the MOMA retrospective, the lid blew off. In putting together an autobiographical slide show to accompany that exhibition—and a photo essay, based on the slide show, that was published in *Artforum*—she told a story she had never gone public with before. Her English governess, it turned out, had had other duties besides teaching the children. Sadie Gordon Richmond, who seems to have been in her late teens when she moved into the Bourgeois household, was Louis Bourgeois's live-in mistress—an arrangement that his wife tolerated for ten years. The *Artforum* piece presented charming snapshots of the Bourgeois ménage—Louise and Sadie boating, Louise and Papa hiking—accompanied by a cold, angry text. Sadie, Bourgeois wrote, "was engaged to teach me English. I thought she was going to like me. Instead of which she betrayed me." Her mother, too, betrayed her, used her as a pawn, a duenna for Sadie and the father. As for the father, one of the photos shows "Fillette," the disembodied penis, looming over a flight of stairs, presumably the stairs to Sadie's bedroom. Bourgeois has described the Sadie business as formative to her work: "The motivation for the work is a negative reaction against her." Or, as she put it in the photo essay, "Every day you have to abandon your past or accept it and then if you cannot accept it you become a sculptor." Though she may have deplored the feminists' claims of victimization, here she took a page out of their book. The title of the photo essay was "Child Abuse."



If Bourgeois, earlier, had been almost perversely tight-lipped, now she became almost perversely confessional. She published her diaries, offering us, for example, a childhood memory of seeing her older sister Henriette making love with the boy from across the street. (There was blood all over. She didn't know that Henriette had her period—she thought the boy was killing her.) When journalists asked her polite questions about form and technique, she countered with statements about life and grief. "Presumably the dangling leg relates to a difficulty in articulation," an interviewer commented about one piece, in 1988. "It is about the control of pain," she replied. "This is turning into a private conversation," he said at one juncture. "I don't mind," she answered. Standing in front of her work, she would give interviewers point-for-point explications: "The three hands are a metaphor for psychological dependency," "The transparent glass represents a sickness," etc.

In the past two decades, Bourgeois's reputation has grown and grown. In 1992, the Guggenheim inaugurated its new SoHo branch with a show entitled "From Brancusi to Bourgeois." The next year, Bourgeois was chosen to represent the United States at the Venice Biennale. When the Tate Modern opened in London, in 2000, its first exhibition was by Bourgeois. This past summer, a trio of her monumental spider sculptures was displayed in Rockefeller Plaza. Then the biggest of the spiders was shipped off to Russia and installed in front of the Hermitage, in St. Petersburg, where Bourgeois was given a three-month retrospective. Some people I have spoken to feel that Bourgeois, as a female artist long neglected by a male-dominated art world, and a woman with an abuse story to tell, fit a little too neatly with the politics of the eighties and nineties for us to believe that her rise to fame was due to artistic considerations alone. This is certainly true. Bourgeois made a good story. People enjoy reading about "dysfunctional families," and if the dysfunction is posited as explanatory—which in Bourgeois's case it sometimes was—so much the better. Modern art is hard to explain.

Actually, Bourgeois's childhood difficulties tell us very little. The more she talks about her traumas and fears, the less we seem to understand her bold, unfrightened work. On some of her sculptures she has inscribed a text, such as "Do you love me?" or "Do not abandon me." These are the pieces I understand the least, because the words get in the way. The same is true of the Sadie story. As Robert Storr has protested, it has become a kind of creation myth for her work, restricting interpretations to "narrowly personal or archetypally Freudian sources." Bourgeois's closet contains other things besides skeletons. She had a solid lycée education, and she knows the history of Western art cold. She is not just a suffering female but a French classicist. In "Sleep II" the dome of the Pantheon figures as strongly as the male genitals, and if it didn't the piece wouldn't be half as interesting.

It is unlikely that Bourgeois used her childhood memories to jack up her reputation. She is the furthest thing from a publicity hound. Since the mid-nineties, she has not even attended her own openings. As for interviews, she gave them for years, but she clearly feared them, and her latter-day confessionalism, like her earlier reticence, may well have been a shield against that fear. "I tell stories to keep questions at bay," she has said. Recently, at a panel on Bourgeois at the Metropolitan Pavilion in New York, I asked why she bothered, so late, to come out with the abuse story. The artist Kiki Smith said she thought that, in telling that story, Bourgeois was not so much explaining her work as putting on a sort of drama, however factual. The editor and curator Louise Neri said the same: the story was a form of "personal theatre." Many public figures come up with a persona that they show to the world. This helps them preserve their privacy. But it can also foster a certain fetishism, and that has happened with Bourgeois. People who don't know her refer to her as Louise. She is often treated as a character, the art world's favorite naughty old lady. She has colluded in this. At her most recent show, her voice, croakily singing French children's songs—"Frère Jacques" and others—was piped into one of the rooms.

But that is play, or public relations. It is not art, and Bourgeois's art deserves its fame. After the MOMA show, she burst into a new period, creating what she has called "cells." These are installations, the size of small rooms, in which she assembles various objects that tell a kind of story. In "Cell (Choisy)" we see a replica of one of her childhood homes—it was in the town of Choisy-le-Roi—exquisitely carved in pink marble. Hanging over it is a huge guillotine blade. With the cells, as with other pieces, Bourgeois has obligingly filled in the "facts." ("The big coat is a metaphor for the unconscious.") Again, however, her explanations seem inadequate, even intrusive. We all know these words, and use them to account for our lives. The cells are something else: hallucinations, the meat locker of the mind.

In recent years, Bourgeois has tired of autobiography. When Storr, in a 1994 interview, put to her a question about her past, she replied, "I'm not interested in that anymore." When he asked her whether the antagonism in her work was in some measure sexual, she answered, "I wouldn't admit that, but you can always propose it." This was more than a decade after she had told everyone within shouting distance that the engine of her art was anger over her governess's affair with her father. Never mind. As she wrote in 1988, in an essay on her piece "The Sail," the work speaks for itself: "Whatever the artist says about it is like an apology, it is not necessary." (Then she went on to discuss the motivations behind "The Sail" for four pages.)

Today Bourgeois is less concerned with anger than with repair. This is an important subject for her, because it is what her mother did for a living, and also because there are things in her life that she would like to repair. This winter, she had a show in New York which featured a roomful of large rag dolls, hanging from the ceiling and copulating. This image goes back not just to her father and Sadie but to Henriette with the boy from across the street. But whereas Bourgeois's earlier representations of that scene were disturbing—the female figure wore a leg brace (Henriette had water on the knee)—these couples were allowed to go about their business unharmed. They were a strange sight, both toylike and grave, tender and lurid. (The male genitals were sewn on, tiny and precise.) The stitch marks running up and down their bodies made them more strange. Their skin had been pierced; we felt it. At the same time, the stitching seemed restorative. Bourgeois was bringing them together, letting them live.

The same ambivalence can be seen in the series of bronze and steel spiders that Bourgeois has been making since the early nineties—for example, the thirty-foot-tall spider that now stands in front of the Hermitage. The figure is frightening, and when you find out its name—"Maman" ("Mommy")—it is more frightening. Bourgeois told me that the spider is a positive metaphor. It is a weaver, and her mother was a weaver: "She always protected me. She was my best friend. She was a monument to me." Nevertheless, there is something peculiar going on here. Remember that in "Child Abuse" the mother also betrayed the child. And consider Bourgeois's poem "Ode to My Mother":

> It is Papa's fault
> *It is* Nanny's fault . . .
> Maman, who's lying? . . .
> Forgive me, Maman, who lies, who
> lies. . . .
> Wait for me, don't run, I'm coming.

The mother's lies, the child's desperation—and that's not the end of it. Bourgeois's giant spider is not just dangerous; she is endangered. "Maman" has an egg sac, full of white marble eggs, hanging from her nether parts, and the sac has a big dent in it, as if it had been violently punched. Down this road we can scarcely go in words. But we can accept an image, a metaphor. I have seen photographs of Russian children, in front of the Hermitage, staring up at "Maman" in wonder. They like it, presumably because it says something true. ♦

NO BRAKES

A new biography of Sinclair Lewis.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Wherever he was, Lewis was able to rise and pound out his daily five thousand words.

What has Sinclair Lewis done lately to deserve a new, five-hundred-and-fifty-four-page (plus notes and index) biography, "Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street," by Richard Lingeman (Random House; $35)? Mark Schorer's even bigger biography of forty years ago, "Sinclair Lewis: An American Life," would seem to have closed the case, at least until Lewis's reputation—stuck in a slot below that of Theodore Dreiser, whose clumsy naturalism attained in at least two novels a tender, awed sense of tragedy that Lewis's satires never mustered, and above that of Upton Sinclair, the remorselessly prolific idealist with whom Lewis was frequently, to his disadvantage, confused—emerges from its doldrums. Unlike Zona Gale or Dorothy Canfield Fisher, he has not been quite forgotten. His pair of breakthrough novels, "Main Street" (1920) and "Babbitt" (1922), both of which contributed new terms to the American vocabulary of self-comprehension, compose a volume in the Library of America, and the Library plans to include in another volume "Arrowsmith" (1925), "Elmer Gantry" (1927), and "Dodsworth" (1929), the other major novels of Lewis's prodigious decade. "Main Street" made a publishing sensation the likes of which hadn't been seen since "Uncle Tom's Cabin" (1852), or at least "Ben-Hur" (1880); the full-price edition, by the fledgling firm of Harcourt, Brace, and the cheaper edition, by Grosset & Dunlap, together sold more than two million copies. Best-selling does not a classic make; "Babbitt" eventually outsold "Main Street" and comes closer to being a contemporary classroom standard, though far surpassed in that regard by a modestly successful short novel of 1925, F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby."

The writers slightly younger than Lewis—Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald—have remained more interesting than he to the critics and academics who perpetuate literary reputations. "Sinclair Lewis is nothing," Hemingway pronounced in his testamental "Green Hills of Africa," and a certain attic dust of datedness, as on quickly obsolete gadgetry, began to gather on Lewis's sensational novels as early as 1930, when he became the first American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. It turns out that the choice, that year, had come down to Lewis and Dreiser, and the three-man committee went for Lewis, two to one, because he embodied "a vigorous trend in modern literature—high-class American humor." Lewis himself, forty-five at the time, was overheard (by Lillian Gish) to say, "This is the end of me. This is fatal. I cannot live up to it." It was not soon fatal, but things were never the same for him, and the rest of his life, while he continued famous and rich, is the tale of a losing struggle against alcoholism, loneliness, restlessness, and depleted, scattered creativity.

No doubt it is to blow the dust off the œuvre that Lingeman has undertaken to tell the author's tale again, but it is hard to know from what angle he is blowing. His acknowledgments claim, "I am critical of the late Mark Schorer's monumental 1961 biography," yet no criticisms emerge until the very end, when an epilogue states that the monumental biography (earlier cited as "an indispensable resource") is "pervaded by such a tone of disapproval that it left the impression with many readers that Schorer disdained both Lewis himself and his work. . . . Schorer's book gave academics and general readers a license not to read Sinclair Lewis, if they needed one." Such a license is generally issued at desks broader than a biographer's, and this peruser of Schorer's ten-year labor of research and criticism felt less disdain than, perhaps, impatience bred of overlong immersion in a character almost everyone found exasperating. Schorer writes in the lofty, sometimes sardonic voice of fifties mandarinism ("Perhaps it is futile," he gloomily muses, "to approach any Lewis novel as a work of art"), but his biography is at most junctures more energetic, more circumstantial, more engaging, and more earnestly analytical than Lingeman's. Lingeman, who devoted two excellent volumes to Dreiser, here seems hurried, and given to summation. He doesn't show Schorer's hospitality to direct quotation—Lewis, after all, crossed the path of almost every literary American of the half century—and many brisk assertions must be taken on faith. "He took the Yale entrance examinations in June, and while browsing in a Saint Paul bookstore met the owner, Arthur Wheelock Upson, a published poet who impressed him vastly." Who says Upson did? "It was not that he didn't want to be like the other boys; he wanted very much to belong, but on his terms." How do we know this? The critical first seventeen years of Lewis's life, spent in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, get thirteen pages; Schorer gave them forty-one, more richly exploiting the not inconsiderable record of small-town news clippings, Lewis's adolescent diary, and his abundant later reflections upon his roots. A portion of what Lingeman offers might be true of almost any boy: "Sometimes, he had to hold in his anger and became moody and withdrawn. This made him wary, touchy, and thin-skinned, lashing out at rejection yet needing acceptance, wanting to belong."

The prose can be untidy to the point of vagueness: "In her memoir, Gracie gives her wedding night the faint virtue of having avoided the Victorian bride's trauma in the hands of a clumsy husband." Some sentences are hastily overloaded: "Jimmy Sheean, to whom Dorothy had been a rock in Moscow when his woman friend had tragically died, and who had returned to the States, joined them at Dorothy's invitation." There is a curious chumminess of diction: we find the phrase "baching it," "rock" oddly employed above and then in "Flanagan, a rock in a crisis," a manuscript called a "script," Hemingway's prose described as "carefully beveled" (chiseled?), and the word "dope" used, by my count, six times to mean "information," only once with quotation marks to indicate slang. To be fair, Lingeman can write wittily, as in calling the Lincoln Highway in the twenties "a notional rather than national road" and in saying of Lewis in Minneapolis society that "his impersonations, raucous speech, love of disputation, and unconventional manners soon mobilized tribal antibodies." But too often he writes like someone with his attention slightly elsewhere, and being editorially advised to get on with it. His biography of Dreiser gave the reader an impression of a basic nobility in the subject, amid considerable muddle and folly. Lewis's foremost virtue comes across as his brute industry: he was heroically able to rise, in whatever unhomey shelter his wanderlust had brought him to, through whatever grisly thickness of hangover, and go to his typewriter and pound out his daily five thousand words.

Lewis typed with his two forefingers, which as he aged became so sensitive from hard use that he taped them. He produced the lesser novel "The Prodigal Parents" (1938) by writing from five in the morning until seven at night for two months. He composed two hundred and twenty-one thousand words of "Main Street" in fourteen weeks, and the four hundred and fifty-eight pages of "It Can't Happen Here" (1935) in four months. He did not, like many speed merchants both modern and Victorian, submit first drafts to the printer; he told James Branch Cabell that he had "destroyed all but a few pages" of the first

"As you can see, ladies and gentlemen, the available data clearly suggest six more weeks of winter."

thirty thousand words of "Main Street," and the editor of his first novel, "Our Mr. Wrenn" (1914), marvelled at the ease and good humor with which he executed suggested revisions. John Hersey, who acted as Lewis's secretary for a summer, was horrified, as he "endlessly" retyped drafts, "to see thousands upon thousands of words—not scattered words and phrases but long passages, whole scenes—ruthlessly slashed out." In England in 1923, Lewis and Arnold Bennett showed each other their manuscripts: Bennett's, of the masterly "Old Wives' Tale," was, in Lewis's eyes, "a strange MS, handwritten, in the most delicate script, legible as typing, with almost no changes in it, and decorated with colored initials by him, so that it's like a monkish scroll," whereas the first typescript of Lewis's "new novel," presumably "Arrowsmith," struck Bennett as "all blue and red with millions of alterations,—a terrible sight." Writing was for Lewis an industrial process, of which the first stage was gathering raw material—interviewing specialists such as clergymen and Realtors, occupying relevant terrains (Kansas City for "Elmer Gantry," Duluth for "Cass Timberlane")—and the second stage was turning his notes, outlines, detailed character sketches, careful maps, and extensive synopses (sixty thousand words, in the case of "Babbitt"!) into fiction.

The one place he did not scour for dope was within himself. The women and the venues of his life left traces in his imagination, and certain characters speak his mind more than others, but his novels took their inspiration from a sociological topic rather than a confessional or self-exploratory impulse. While drawing on Sauk Centre memories all his life, Lewis never, Schorer points out, wrote the "Moon-Calf" novel so frequent in American literature—the autobiographical account of a "sensitive and misunderstood adolescent" in an unsympathetic environment—though young Hal Lewis certainly was a mooncalf, spindly, pimply, ill-coördinated, unpopular, romantically book-obsessed. And a mooncalf he remained, while acquiring wealth enough to wear London suits, travel through Europe, buy big houses, divorce two women, and get radium treatments for his face that ravaged it further. I would have welcomed from Lingeman a more detailed medical account of Lewis's red, riddled face. Hemingway viciously harped on Lewis's ugliness, even putting it into the novel "Across the River and Into the Trees," though it was Mary Hemingway who, after an encounter with the elderly Lewis in Venice, penned the horrific image "His face was a piece of old liver, shot squarely with a #7 shot at twenty yards."

One wonders how his facial appearance, which might have made many men wish to be inconspicuous, consorted with his insatiable desire to show off and dominate a room. He was compulsively theatrical; as his affair with the young actress Marcella Powers intensified his interest in the stage, he wrote numerous plays and ebulliently acted in other people's, taking such roles as that of the Stage Manager in Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" and, in Paul Vincent Carroll's "Shadow and Substance," that of a priest opposite Powers's girlish aspirant to sainthood. "The theatre fascinated him," the playwright Marc Connelly later wrote, "but I do not think he ever had any comprehension of its technical demands." Amateur performance was his métier. Bennett, the most sympathetic and patient of Lewis's British observers, noted in his journals:

> Lewis has a habit of breaking into a discussion with long pieces of imaginary conversation between imaginary or real people of the place and period under discussion. Goodish, but too long, with accent, manner, and all complete. He will do this in any discussion; he will drag in a performance, usually full of oaths and blasphemy.

Schorer, finding boyhood acquaintances still alive in Sauk Centre, reported that two of them concurred in remembering Lewis as "a show-off and something of a bore." Corroborative testimony abounds. William E. Woodward, in a 1934 *New Yorker* Profile, allowed, "Even his pleasing talent for impersonation dazes people unless they know him well." Rebecca West, an astute and initially enthusiastic critic of his work, said that his torrent of talk "was wonderful, but after five solid hours of it I ceased to look upon him as a human being." A Minneapolis journalist, William McNally, watching Lewis paralyze local society with "impersonations that went on for hours," concluded, "He cannot travel other than 'on high' and has no brakes." In the aftermath of "Babbitt" he continually talked Babbittese, and when his second wife, the long-suffering Dorothy Thompson, was ushering him, straitjacketed, into an ambulance during an attack of the DTs, he forestalled her reproaches by expertly mimicking her: "You've ruined your life, you're ruining mine! You've ruined your sons, you miserable creature. You're sick, sick."

Mimicry is, of course, a way of avoiding conversation, of drowning out interchange. Lewis, Lingeman says, "had a phobia about being alone," but he contrived to be alone when surrounded by people, deafened by his own "endlessly narratory" voice. One of the few friends who stayed the route with him, Carl Van Doren, said, "What Red doesn't realize is that in order to have friends, one must be willing to suffer a little boredom, and Red has never learned that, and he has almost no friends left." His personal qualities carried into the fiction: it tends to be, aside from some of its well-felt domestic moments, loud and blatant, more performance than shared experience. Everything illustrates the point. George Babbitt reads the newspaper, with comments to his wife:

> "Lots of news. Terrible big tornado in the South. Hard luck, all right. But this, say, this is corking! Beginning of the end for those fellows! New York Assembly has passed some bills that ought to completely outlaw the socialists! And there's an elevator-runners' strike in New York and a lot of college boys are taking their places. That's the stuff! And a mass-meeting in Birmingham's demanded that this Mick agitator, this fellow De Valera, be deported. Dead right, by golly! All these agitators paid with German gold anyway. And we got no business interfering with the Irish or any other foreign government. Keep our hands strictly off. And there's another well-authenticated rumor from Russia that Lenin is dead. That's fine. It's beyond me why we don't just step in there and kick those Bolshevik cusses out."

Further, his satire, as more politically committed critics pointed out, ends up in a kind of hopeless surrender to the values satirized. No wonder he could never make headway on the big labor novel that he contemplated for decades; his sympathies were thoroughly bourgeois, and his knowingness had to do with the maneuvers whereby the bourgeoisie regroups after a setback and carries on. His novels have happy endings, and when something tragic happened to him, like the death of his elder son, Wells, in the Second World War, he turned from it. The boy, the product of Lewis's marriage to Grace Hegger, was better than his disrupted upbringing warranted—a graduate of Harvard magna cum laude, the promising author of a novel, and such a spit-and-polish aide-de-camp that a German sniper may have shot him under the impression that Wells himself was the general whom he was accompanying in a jeep in Italy. Lewis's reaction was to rebuff expressions of sympathy and treat the grieving mother with what she called an "abominable" coolness.

And yet the single photograph in the bedroom of his Duluth mansion was of Wells. When all complaints about Lewis's rude, skittish, impossible social behavior are registered, there remained something good-hearted about him, as we can read in "First Job," Hersey's account of his pleasant summer with Lewis, a summer when Lewis was not drinking. In a more bluntly rivalrous literary atmosphere than obtains now, he was generous in praise of other writers, even those who, like Dreiser and Hemingway, quarrelled with him. His yen to perform in the theatre and the lecture hall had its self-abnegating, modest side, and there was a generosity, too, in the topics he chose to address, with his ebbing novelistic powers, after the war: feminist issues in "Cass Timberlane" (1945) and "World So Wide" (1951), racism in "Kingsblood Royal" (1947), a melodramatic, slashing book that blacks liked more than whites. Paul Robeson's wife, Eslanda, wrote him that "it is a beautiful job, and one which Negroes could not have done, because it just isn't our side of the medal." Main Street and Babbitt became glib tags only after he had exercised the social vision to uncover and name them. John O'Hara said, "All the other novelists and journalists and Babbitt himself were equally blind to Babbitt and Zenith and the United States of America until 1922." Who in the last century more manfully and systematically attempted to fill the demand, in recent times voiced by Tom Wolfe and Jonathan Franzen, that American novelists cast off solipsism and introverted delicacy and embrace the nation as it exists, in its striving variety and dynamism?

Sauk Centre now holds a Sinclair Lewis Avenue, and boasts on signs of being "The Original Main Street"—it has enlisted Lewis in the boosterism that he mocked. The town is the occasional site of the annual meeting of the Sinclair Lewis Society, which issues, Lingeman says in his acknowledgments, a "lively newsletter." I have scanned Lingeman's seventy pages of notes and seven pages of bibliography hoping to snag my eyes on publications since 1961 that might urge an updating of Schorer's biography, and noticed few. In these forty years, a new sexual frankness is permitted, if not compulsory, in biography, and Schorer's explanation of why Michael Lewis, Sinclair's younger son, was forty-five minutes late for dinner with his father in Rome—"He had been enjoying Rome during the afternoon and arrived about forty-five minutes late"—can be, with a puzzling change of meal, amplified by Lingeman to: "When Michael Lewis arrived at Christmastime, he committed the faux pas of spending the night with a prostitute he picked up on Via Veneto. This escapade caused him to arrive late for Lewis's rigidly planned lunch." Sexual specifics that Thompson confided by letter to Schorer's discretion can now be broadcast:

> She summed up Lewis's problem as premature ejaculation due to nervousness: "He could be tender, playful, delightful with women *except* in the sexual relationship." She told Schorer that Lewis would "fuck her quick and then abuse her verbally."
>
> Later, Lewis's inadequacies as a lover would drive Dorothy to others for affection. As she told Schorer: "All his wives, even when they stuck to him, had affairs."

Well, who ever said that alcoholic mooncalves made great lovers? As for his "alcoholism," the word has taken on, thanks to the helpful credo of Alcoholics Anonymous, the dignity of a disease, whose victims are mired beyond their own will power. But Lewis could quit, when he wanted to, and the fact that he didn't want to more often suggests a character trait, not a physiological one. The invaluable Thompson (always marry a writer if you want your underside in black and white) recorded in her diary a night when instead of taking her to a full-dress ball as he had promised he called up, said "I'm shot . . . Come here, darling," passed out in her arms, and woke up enough to make love and buy sausages, in that order, while the "alcohol odor oozing from his pores was 'like rank weeds.' " Next morning, shaky but articulate, he explained that he knew he must choose between spirits and her and he could not give up spirits. From her diary:

> "A man takes a drink," he said, "the drink takes another, and the drink takes the man. And it's got me. I don't know how it began. It was my father & Gracie. They both hated me—and you will hate me too. I am a rotter, but I won't go like Verlaine—like Oscar Wilde. I'll take care not to get that far."

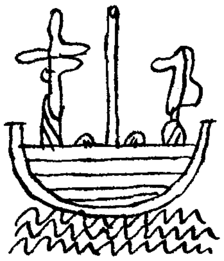
He did get that far, but, dying at the age of sixty-five, took longer than it took Verlaine and Wilde, and longer than his fellow Midwestern topers Scott Fitzgerald and Ring Lardner. He shared with Thompson that night a no win/no lose formulation which left room for doing his work but not any for family life or what Freud called normal human unhappiness. His frenetic activity—all those books, all those addresses, all those binges—seems in the retelling one long escape, an anesthetic administered to a peculiarly American pain, just before the last screw of his talent could be turned. Rebecca West sagely complained as early as 1927, "If he would sit still so that life could make any deep impression on him, if he would attach himself to the human tradition by occasionally reading a book which would set him a standard of profundity, he could give his genius a chance."

It is the conflicting fate of an American artist to long for profundity while suspecting that, most profoundly, none exists; all is surface, and rather flimsy surface at that. Lewis admired Thoreau, and made fitful retreats into the North American wilderness to regroup his resources, only to fill the tent with the fumes of Scotch and the rattle of his impersonations. Three quotations from Lewis come to mind as epitaphs, two of them cited by Lingeman: "I love America, but I don't like it," and "Everyone ought to have a home to get away from." The third is reported by Schorer, who has the everlasting advantage over his successor biographers of having entered the field when it still held living witnesses: "Once, to the Leonard Bacons, whose very nuzzling dog was giving him a good deal of attention, Lewis said, 'I'm just like this dog. All I want is affection.' " Affection may be what he wanted, but attention is what he got. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Rapture, *by Susan Minot (Knopf; $18).* This novella takes place during a single act of oral sex, wittily reminding us (as did its notorious counterpart, Harold Brodkey's "Innocence") that a lot more thinking goes on between the sheets than is generally acknowledged. Benjamin is a handsome and hapless film director with a moneyed and supportive fiancée; Kay is his former production designer, with whom he had a fling on a shoot in Mexico. After three years of agonized liaisons and enforced partings, Benjamin and Kay fall into bed once more, but they seem to bring the rest of their lives along with them, and Minot's saucy conceit evolves into a disconcerting examination of love and war between the sexes. As Kay and Benjamin review the affair from their respective vantage points, it becomes increasingly clear to the reader that—physical proximity notwithstanding—they are worlds apart.

Frank Lloyd Wright and Lewis Mumford: Thirty Years of Correspondence, *edited by Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer and Robert Wojtowicz (Princeton Architectural Press; $27.50).* This rich exchange between two fiery American iconoclasts began in 1926, when Wright was at a low point in his career. In desperate need of renewed critical interest in his work, he approached Mumford with an admiring note, and they developed an often wary friendship that meanders from growing intimacy to a bitter break over the Second World War and then to a gradual reconciliation. The collection stands out in particular for the intensity of the pair's intellectual discourse. Both Wright and Mumford rejected the harsh orthodoxy of modernists like Le Corbusier and shared a kind of Emersonian wish that architecture and technology should better serve humanistic ideals. The reader is left with a rueful sense of how little of that architectural vision prevailed in the postwar era.



A Life in Pieces, *by Blake Eskin (Norton; $25.95).* This is ostensibly a retelling of the story of Binjamin Wilkomirski, the Swiss musician who deceived the world with a wholly invented "memoir" of a childhood destroyed by the Holocaust. But, while Eskin offers a fascinating portrait of Wilkomirski in all his piteous self-delusion, the real importance of his book lies in its critical look at the broader social and historical forces that allowed his hoax to flourish, including the recovered-memory movement, the community of Jewish child survivors, the intricacies of Switzerland's relationship with Nazi Germany, and the seemingly irresistible trend toward the sentimentalization of the Holocaust. After meeting Wilkomirski (before his unmasking), Eskin embarked on a quest to discover what had happened to his mother's relatives during the Second World War. In acknowledging his own hunger for some connection to historical catastrophe, he offers a convincing explanation of why people were so eager to be deluded.

Dream Street, *edited by Sam Stephenson (Lyndhurst/Norton; $39.95).* In 1955, the historian Stefan Lorant hired W. Eugene Smith to make a hundred photographs of contemporary Pittsburgh for a book in celebration of the city's bicentennial; he expected the job to take no more than three weeks. But Smith, whose grand ambitions and uncompromising aesthetic had recently led him to resign his stormy tenure at *Life*, quickly became obsessed, shooting some seventeen thousand pictures. Inspired by Joyce and Faulkner, Smith envisioned a symphonic, multilayered photo essay portraying the entire city; his failure to complete it haunted him for the rest of his life. Here are more than a hundred and fifty of his noirish and oddly poignant images: gleaming railyards at night; buildings wrapped in clouds of industrial smoke; the face of a steelworker, the Bessemer fires reflected in his safety goggles.

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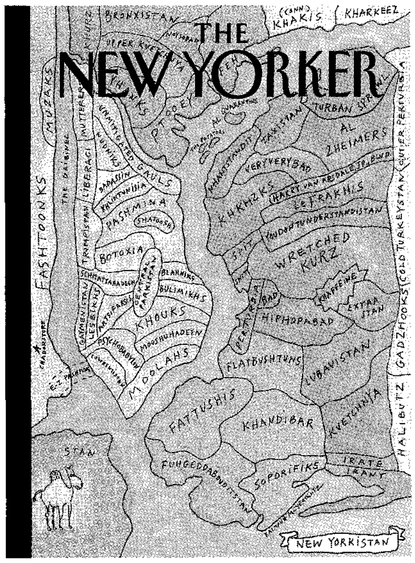

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

SHOCK WAVES

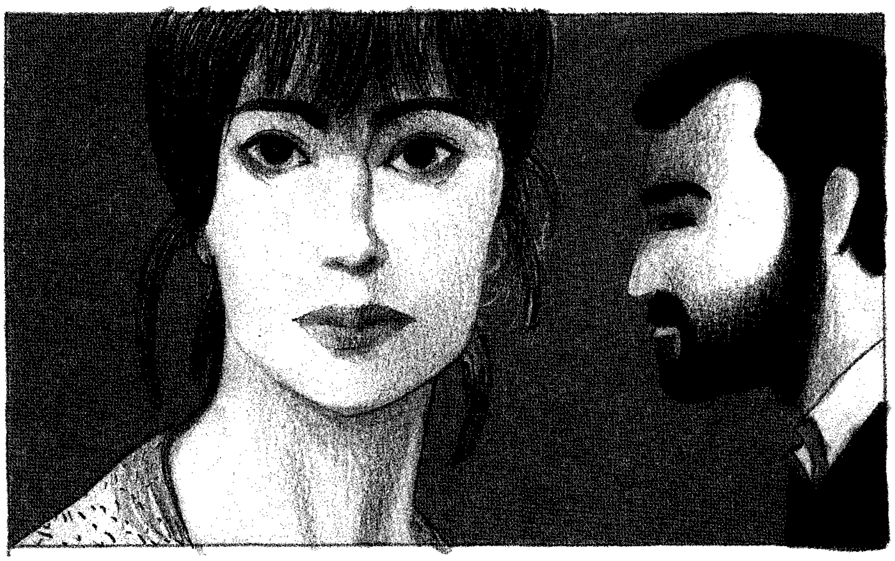
"The Son's Room" and "Storytelling."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The director Nanni Moretti has been tagged as the Italian Woody Allen. I cannot conceive of more disparate souls. The Allen we see onscreen is controlled by an invisible puppeteer, who ordains every trudging Woody walk, every sickly grimace, every despairing splay and chop of the hands. Moretti, by contrast, is gentle and filleted, his hands drooping from his wrists, his bearded face never far from a smile of resignation. Allen is infinitely funnier yet more easily seduced by the solemn; he lives in terror of dying—of his own death—whereas Moretti, who calmly chronicled his cancer treatment in "Dear Diary," would be far more stricken, I imagine, by the passing of others.

Such is the implication of "The Son's Room," in which Moretti finally shrugs off the whimsy that has dogged his previous projects, and which won him the Palme d'Or at last year's Cannes Film Festival. He himself stars as Giovanni, a shrink with a happy family. It sounds implausible, I know; surely the least we can ask of our therapists is that they should fail utterly to soothe the neuroses of their own relations. But everything really is rosy in this home by the sea: Giovanni enjoys his practice, he is married to Paola (Laura Morante), and they love their two children, Irene (Jasmine Trinca) and Andrea (Giuseppe Sanfelice), both of whom love them back. The whole thing sounds like a pilot episode of "Little House on the Piazza."

Two things, however, pull this sketch of earthly felicity back from the brink of the insipid. First, it *is* a sketch; Moretti is so light on his feet, and so deft at scissoring scenes before they turn heavy on him, that we have no time to begrudge these people their contentment. Second, we know what happens to happiness. When a man finds a wife as beautiful as Paola—so beautiful that even her gestures of forgiveness look like dance moves—he may have exhausted his share of mortal blessings. Emotional realists might even argue that Giovanni has it coming; given that his children are perhaps the least screwed-up teen-agers in the Northern Hemisphere, and that Andrea resembles one of those youths with downturned eyes who hang around at the back of a Masaccio, what can you expect? The best get hit by the worst; Andrea is killed on a diving trip with friends, and the world snaps shut. We see Giovanni getting the bad news, shouting in the street, and driving to a basketball game where Irene is on the court. She smiles at her father, sees his face, and her face falls in turn; the game runs on around her, with the slap of sneakers, but she is made of marble. Cut to the family home, and to Irene collapsing into her mother's arms. There you have it: a full and stormy set of responses, in less than a couple of minutes.



Nanni Moretti plays a happy psychiatrist; Laura Morante is his wife.

LORENZO MATTOTI

There is nothing new in this tale, but then death has a nasty habit of being unoriginal. When Giovanni and Paola stop sleeping together, and conversation fails between them, they are following a track that has been trodden by generations of parents split by the death of a child. (These two become as helpless as kids themselves, while their daughter seems to grow into adulthood overnight.) If we are drawn to the tale of their decline, it is because the uplands of the movie's first half were so convincingly mapped, and because of the jagged, scattershot way in which the family casts about for scraps of possible redemption. The husband goes to a diving-equipment store and asks about pressure gauges, not because he suspects foul play but because even foulness would be better than blind bad luck; his wife phones Andrea's girlfriend, of whose existence they were unaware, and asks to meet her. And, throughout it all, the psychiatrist continues to advise his patients on their foibles and phobias, barely able to restrain himself from yelling the obvious rebuke: My son is dead, and you're worried about your sex life?

The irony is that, early in the film, we caught a glimpse of Giovanni's own sex life, and, in its ordinariness, it remains a reason to live. Our hero, clad in pajamas so forbiddingly unsexy that they must have been woven in England, turns to his wife as she eases down the strap of her nightdress. Not only do they keep the light on while they make love but that light is a blank glare; he might as well be kissing her breasts in a hospital. Yet the scene succeeds, precisely because there is so little scene-setting at work, no veiling or glossing of the nuptial bed; these people still desire each other so instinctively that they require no help from their surroundings. Some viewers, unsettled by such an unvarnished style, will complain that "The Son's Room" is no more than a high-class telemovie; but Moretti is more of a skeptical essayist than a hand-wringer, and no TV director would have included the sequence at the fun fair, where Giovanni wanders on the night of the funeral. He puts himself through terrifying rides, shaking like a rat, as if to hammer his being back into life with an overdose of sensation.

To those familiar with the Moretti canon, "The Son's Room" will sound like an ominous dive in tone, from comical candor to a prickly moan of distress. Yet that is not how it plays; you leave the film like one of Giovanni's patients rising from the couch—far from healed, but amused and pacified by the sympathy that has washed over you. This gloomiest of stories contrives to end in sunshine, on a beach. The family has journeyed overnight, and the movie has travelled further still; the camera is let off the leash and allowed to glide. All in all, if you can take an extra helping of bereavement, "The Son's Room" would make a daring double bill with "In the Bedroom." The strange thing is that Todd Field's frowning film has the greater weight, and finds no way out of violence, whereas Moretti's work is crisper, shorter, and, thanks to the shrink's clientele, less afraid of jokes. Faced with loss, the American movie roots deeper into the darkness, while the European one is dawning into hope. Isn't it supposed to be the other way around?

The new Todd Solondz film, "Storytelling," is in fact two films for the price of one. The first half hour revolves around a creative-writing class, at which college students show the fruits of their labors—most of which are both moldy and unripe—to their fellow-students. The forum is overseen by their daunting professor (Robert Wisdom), a winner of the Pulitzer Prize. He affects great scorn for most of what is read out, but this does not stop some of his pupils from seeking his favor; we follow Vi (Selma Blair), who goes home with him one night and submits to his unusually specific requests.

That's it, really; what heats up an average power play is the spicy casting, and the bad taste that Solondz likes to toss over our unremarkable lusts. Vi's boyfriend (Leo Fitzpatrick) suffers from cerebral palsy; her professor is grand and black, and the camera deliberately frames the couple to provoke racial disquiet. In his bedroom, she disrobes and stands there, skinny and milky, while he remains a looming hulk in the shadows: a Mandingo moment for postmodernists, which Vi turns into a short story. Solondz wants to throw you, take you aback, and probe your correctness, yet most of his subversive moves are easily spotted. If his lip-smacking ironies perform any kind of public service, it has little to do with the deconstruction of bodily prejudice and a lot to do with creative-writing programs. In the interest of safety, these should be treated like nuclear reprocessing plants. If you see kids trying to write fiction, stay away.

The second part of the film introduces us to the Livingston family. We have the parents (John Goodman and Julie Hagerty) and their three sons—two good ones, and Scooby (Mark Webber). Scooby is a no-hoper and proud of it; even his one hope—to be on TV—is completely hopeless. Yet fame does crawl in his direction, in the shape of a dorkish documentarian, Toby (Paul Giamatti), who wants to focus on Scooby for a film about high-school aspirations. The mumbling comedy of this could only come from Solondz, but, as with "Happiness," his previous downer, his motives feel back-to-front; the urge to make viewers squirm is fair enough, but when it runs ahead of the urge to entertain—when the jokes trail in the wake of the embarrassments—you can't help leaving the theatre sad and soured. I preferred "Storytelling" to "Happiness," and it's fun watching Vi and Toby—the storytellers—trying to fumble their experience into narrative, but the final audacity still eludes Solondz: Will he ever dare to show us an American suburb that is not peopled by fuming freaks—a place where people are, you know, O.K.? ♦

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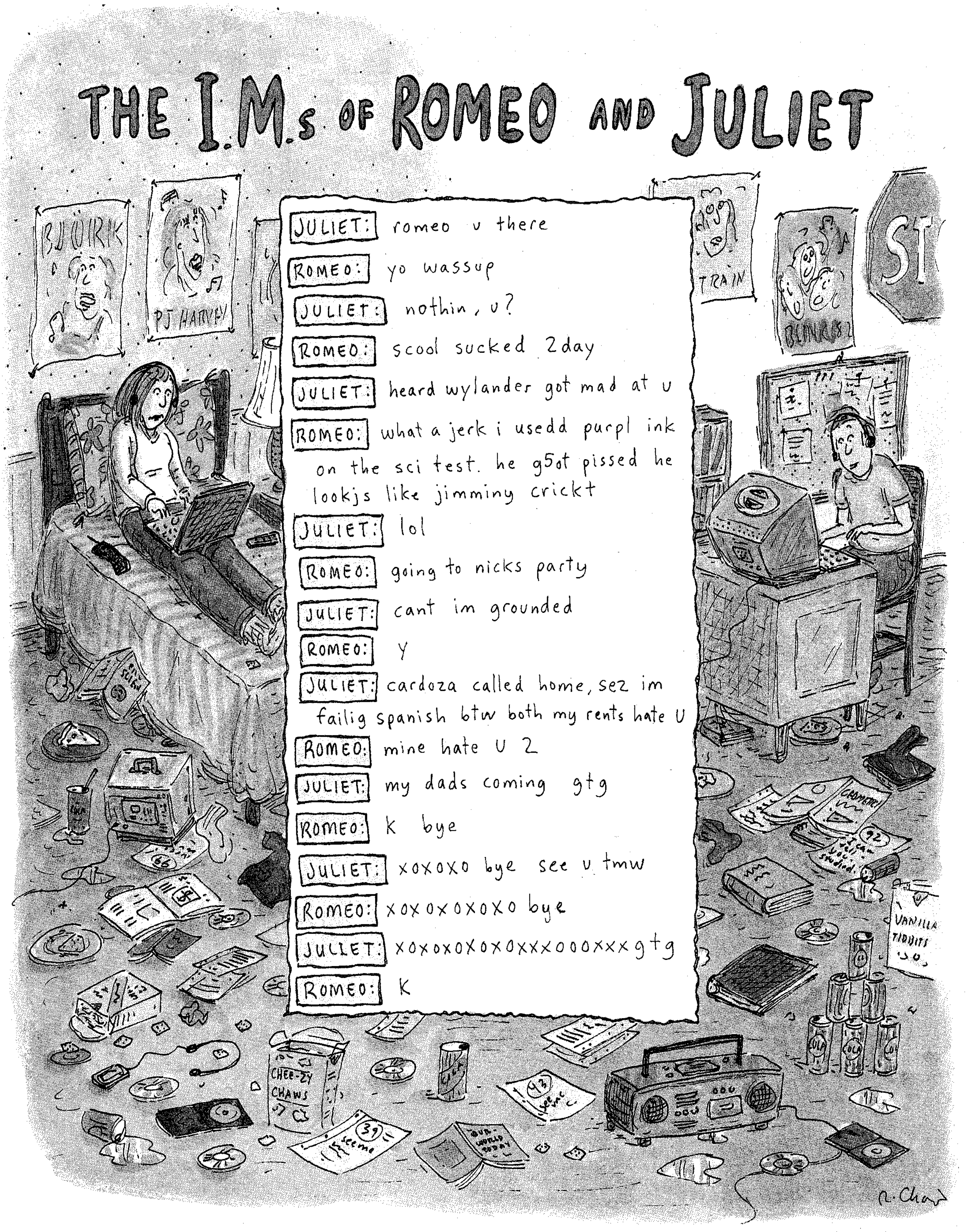
THE I.M.s OF ROMEO AND JULIET


BJÖRK
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ST
CHEE-ZY CHAWS
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see me
R. Chast

JULIET: romeo u there

ROMEO: yo wassup

JULIET: nothin, u?

ROMEO: scool sucked 2day

JULIET: heard wylander got mad at u

ROMEO: what a jerk i usedd purpl ink on the sci test. he g5ot pissed he lookjs like jimminy crickt

JULIET: lol

ROMEO: going to nicks party

JULIET: cant im grounded

ROMEO: y

JULIET: cardoza called home, sez im failig spanish btw both my rents hate U

ROMEO: mine hate U 2

JULIET: my dads coming gtg

ROMEO: k bye

JULIET: xoxoxo bye see u tmw

ROMEO: xoxoxoxoxo bye

JULIET: xoxoxoXoxoxxxoooxxxgtg

ROMEO: K

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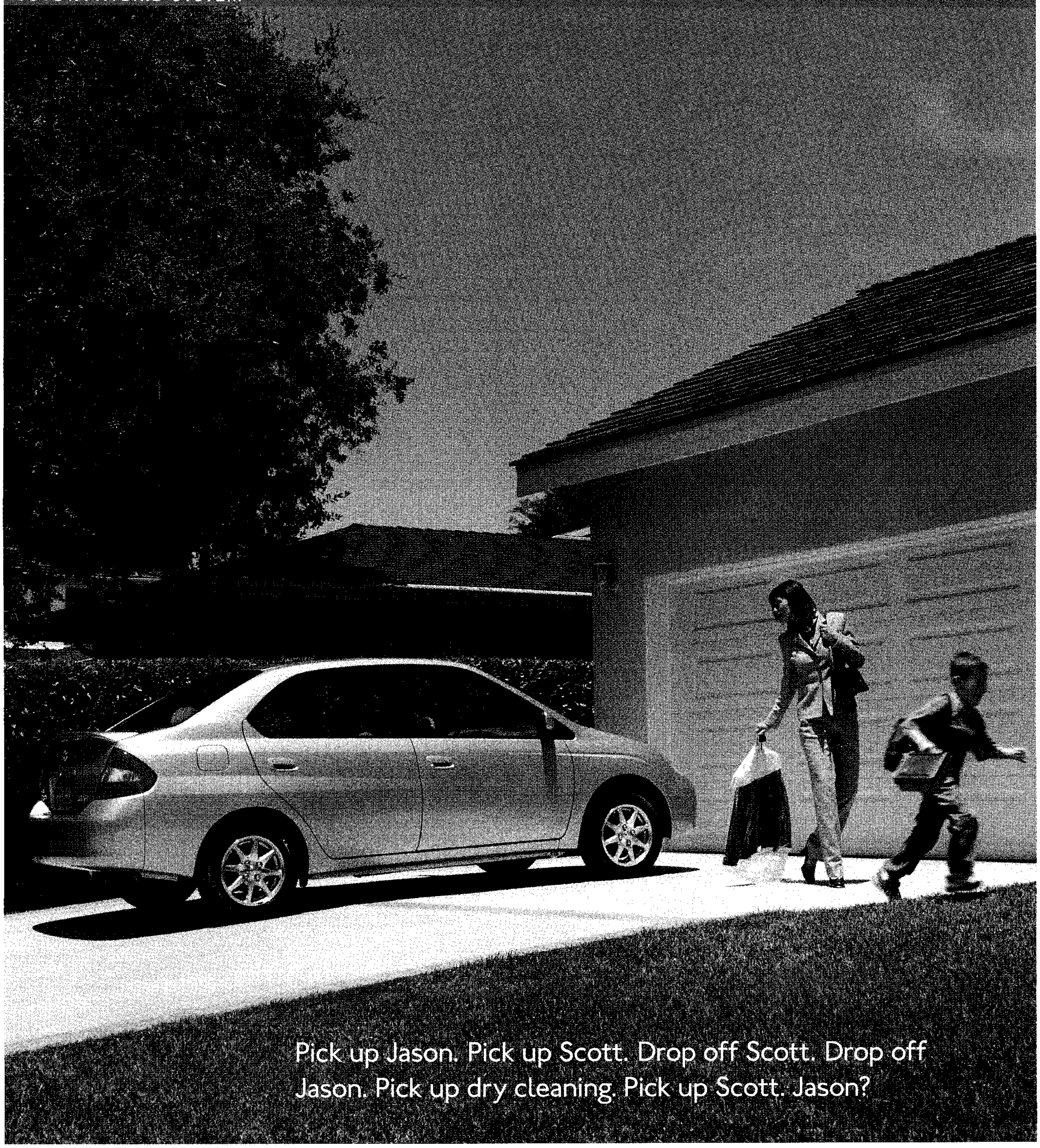
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